

October to December 2024

“The Book of First Samuel”

by Rev Dr Michael Koech

About the Author



Rev Dr Michael Koech serves in Kenya, East Africa, as the pastor of Kapkwen Africa Gospel Unity Church, principal of Bomet Bible Institute, and Bishop of the Africa Gospel Unity Church. He was saved in 1974 out of a Roman Catholic background. A graduate of the Bible College of East Africa (Nairobi) in 1978, he went on to obtain his Bachelor of Theology (1987), Master of Divinity (2004), Master of Theology (2005) and Doctor of Religious Education (2019) degrees from the Far Eastern Bible College (Singapore). Married to Susan Koech, they have two children (Martha and Moses).

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 1

1 SAMUEL 13:14, 15:22

2 PETER 1:19-21

*“We have also a more sure
word of prophecy.”*

A BOOK OF ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS

The thirty-nine books in the Old Testament are divided into the Pentateuch (the Law), the historical books, the “wisdom” books and the prophets. The Book of Joshua is the first historical book and begins with the settlement of Israel in the Land of Canaan. The Book of First Samuel (the fourth historical book of the Old Testament) tells of the transition in Israel from judges to kings. The division of First Samuel as a separate book came from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Originally, First Samuel to Second Kings were one book, but later was divided into four. These divisions were meant for easy reference but do not change the content of the books. This system has since become the standard for recognizing the books of the Bible.

The writer of First Samuel is not mentioned anywhere in the text. When God did not mention the human writer, He says, “Man need not know.” Just know that God is the Author! Three hundred to four hundred years have passed since Joshua led the Israelites into Cis-Jordan to occupy the Land of Promise. God was Israel’s King i.e. Israel was a theocracy. First Samuel records why and when the theocratic rule of God over Israel ended. Tired of the old and repetitive sinful way of “everyone doing what was right in their own eyes,” Israel demanded a king from the LORD. God granted Israel their sinful request for a king. This was the beginning of the monarchy.

Having a king was not wrong, but the reason Israel had when they asked for a king was wrong. Replacing theocratic rule with a monarchical rule would not improve Israel’s spiritual well-being when the problem was not the system of rule but the sins of Israel. Tragically, Israel would end with an exile that cost her sovereignty. The sin of idolatry is a very serious transgression that no believer must take lightly.

THOUGHT: Man, not the system, is usually the problem.

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Heavenly Father, that Thy Word reveals all the truth I need to live for Christ.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 2

1 SAMUEL 13:14; 15:22

MARK 1:1-2

“...the LORD hath sought him
a man after his own heart...”

A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

The context of the description of David in 1 Samuel 13:14 was King Saul's failure to repent of his sin against God. He blamed others for his iniquity. King Saul remained in sin all his life for his failure to repent. The LORD ended his kingdom as the LORD was the One who appointed him as the first king of Israel and called him into kingship. King Saul had no one to blame for his rejection but himself.

He could not blame David for usurping his throne, for David was born eight years after God's judgment fell on King Saul. The phrase “*a man after his (God's) own heart*” summarises David's life. It was not based upon anything David did! He sinned like King Saul. But David repented the moment he was rebuked for his sin, unlike King Saul who was a man after his own heart. King Saul cared for his name at the expense of God's Name, unlike David, who suffered and endured the life of a fugitive and refused to kill or injure King Saul no matter how King Saul came after him. To kill or hurt King Saul was to contend against God, for God anointed King Saul, and only God could take King Saul's life. When David sinned against God, he did everything possible, including self-humiliation, to repair and restore the holy image of Christ in his life.

All believers are men and women after God's heart, for the Holy Spirit working in every believer's heart brings about genuine repentance. David's life was far from sinless. We all know about his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. Unlike King Saul, David repented immediately when Prophet Nathan pointed out his sin. His prayer of repentance is recorded in Psalm 51 for all believers to learn true repentance.

THOUGHT: Help me, O God, to be a man/woman after God's own heart all the days of my life.

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to be holy as Thou art holy, for Jesus' sake.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 3

1 SAMUEL 1:1-18

GALATIANS 5:13-15

*“Thou shalt love
thy neighbor as thyself.”*

LIGHT SHINES BRIGHTEST IN DARKEST NIGHT

It is most comforting to know that in the midst of the period of Judges (lasted more than 350 years) when every man did what was right in his own eyes that there was a woman of prayer, faith and devotion in Israel. Her name was Hannah. The LORD had “*shut up her womb*” (1 Sam 1:5) which was considered a curse according to the Law of Moses. Added on to this stigma was the torment she received from Peninnah, her husband’s other wife. No matter how much more her husband loved her compared to Peninnah it brought little or no comfort. The curse of a barren womb and provocation from Peninnah were beyond earthly comfort.

During one of these annual trips to Shiloh where the Tabernacle was located, Hannah prayed to the LORD for mercy. She vowed that if the LORD granted her a son, she would dedicate him to the LORD as a Nazarite to serve Him all his life. The Lord heard her cry and granted her desire. She named her son Samuel (i.e. asked of God) because she asked for a son from the LORD.

From the darkest moment of her life, she experienced the brightest light from the Lord. She kept her word and dedicated Samuel to the LORD. Samuel became the last judge and the first prophet to rule Israel before the monarchy. He was also a king-maker.

Samuel was a faithful servant of the LORD.

THOUGHT: Pray to the Lord in the darkest hour and experience the light.

PRAYER: Father, may I pray always especially when all seem hopeless. For Jesus’ sake, hear my humble cry.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 4

1 SAMUEL 1:19-28

PSALM 31:1-5

“...*thou hast redeemed me,
O LORD God of truth.*”

THE LORD ANSWERED HANNAH'S PRAYER

The answer to Hannah's prayer began with Eli, the priest. Eli had mistaken her for being drunk when he saw her. Hannah explained and then Eli understood why she prayed thus. He then wished her well, and said that the God of Israel would grant her the petition she asked of Him.

The words of Eli were an added encouragement to Hannah. She was happy that she found grace in his sight, “*and her countenance was no more sad*” (1 Sam 1:18). Early the following morning in Shiloh, they rose up and worshipped the Lord before returning to their home in Ramah. Then, “*the LORD remembered her*” (1 Sam 1:19), and Hannah conceived and bore a son and called his name Samuel, meaning one who had been asked of the Lord. When the child was still a baby, Hannah did not go to Shiloh to worship as they would usually do annually. She remained at home to nurse the baby, till he was weaned. She explained herself and her intentions to her husband. He understood her and gave her leave to do as she wished. It was then a time of joy and blessing for Hannah. She waited until the baby was weaned.

When the child was weaned, Hannah honoured her vow to the Lord, showing her commitment to God. Now that the child was able to live independently, she was confident that he would perform well. She believed that all were possible with the Lord. The presentation ceremony was elaborate as she had to offer sacrifices. This was the standard offering and the quantity in Hannah's offering shows how much she valued the occasion. She offered the bullock and brought the child to Eli the priest. She identified herself formally to the priest and revealed her identity. She told him that she was the woman who had stood there by him praying to the Lord. She declared that she was praying for a child and the Lord had answered her. She also told the priest that she had lent him to the Lord. Thus, Hannah worshipped the Lord. It was a happy occasion for everyone.

THOUGHT: The Lord knows my sincerity when I pray.

PRAYER: Father, teach me to pray in faith always.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 5

1 SAMUEL 2:1-10

JOHN 9:24-33

*“If this man were not of God,
he could do nothing.”*

HANNAH’S WORDS OF PRAISE

Hannah found comfort in the Lord’s house. When she had presented Samuel before the Lord, she prayed and expressed the joy in her heart. She declared her deep consideration of the Lord’s dealing with her. She spoke of joy in her heart for the salvation of the Lord. She said that the Lord is the God of knowledge and controls the actions of man.

Hannah had a practical testimony behind her expressions. Thus, the gracious words of praise flowed from her lips. She was earlier introduced as a woman in a polygamous marriage who could not bear a child. This made her trust in her Lord more. Time passed by and the family was faithful in the spiritual exercises. Hannah had a greater burden in her heart, and she knew that nobody could help to unload it. Only the Lord could lend her a hand. She was joyful because the Heavenly Master was gracious to her and He is the source of all blessings. A child is a new life that comes to the earth and the days of that life are also numbered by God. Hannah was no priest nor was she a student of theology, but her words expressed great theological truths. She was like the blind man in John 9 whose eyes were opened by Jesus. He testified what the Lord had done for him and that Jesus was able to restore his eyesight. He also believed that Jesus is the Son of God. He knew more theology than the religious leaders of his day.

Hannah expressed her knowledge of God through her experience of God working in her life. In her words, God is the source of all riches because all things are His (1 Sam 2:7-8). Her family was not poor as they brought worthy portions to the house of the Lord for sacrifices. Her song in the text was a thanksgiving for what the Lord had done for her. Every child of God ought to have such a testimony too.

THOUGHT: God’s truth is found where it is least expected.

PRAYER: Father, may the Holy Spirit teach Thy truth to me.

HANNAH'S AND THE MINISTRY OF SAMUEL

Hannah said that God kept the feet of His saints, and the wicked shall be silent (1 Sam 2:9). The hand of God cannot be stopped by man, and those who go against the will of God will come to naught. She said that the adversaries of the Lord would be judged and destroyed, but the Lord's anointed would be preserved. There was fullness of joy as Hannah again poured out her heart in praise to the Lord (1 Sam 2:1). The occasion was a joyous one as Hannah kept the vow that she had made when she prayed to the Lord to give her a man child. She came with her husband and fulfilled her duty in Shiloh. Samuel, the son of her vow, still being a child, was left to minister before the Lord and Eli the priest.

The family of Elkanah came from the tribe of Ephraim and not from the tribe of Levi that was set aside to be priests. When Samuel's mother offered him to the Lord, it was just her gratitude to God for giving her that child. However, Samuel was destined to that office, and the foundation was laid for his important ministry. His story is like that of John the Baptist, their destinies were determined by God even before they were conceived. The revelation from the Lord concerning the birth of John was direct, and the parents followed the Lord's directive. For Samuel, his mother had taken the initiative, but still the hand of the Lord was clear in directing the ministry that His servant was destined to fulfil.

Mothers are important in influencing their children in what they can do for the Lord. It is important then for them to seek the Lord's direction concerning their children. They must guide their children to do the work that God shows them. This direction is clear in the story of Samuel as Hannah played a key role. Guiding the children in spiritual matters is what God has intended for parents to do. Let us pray to the Lord to help those of us who are parents to do our part.

THOUGHT: Every parent is key to the child's spiritual welfare.

PRAYER: Father, may all believing parents admonish their children accordingly.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 7

1 SAMUEL 2:12-36

ROMANS 6:19-23

*“For the wages of sin is death;
but the gift of God is eternal life...”*

HANNAH’S WORK IN GOD’S HOUSE

The sinfulness of the sons of Eli was abhorring. The fruit of original sin was manifested in actual sin. The temptation and will to commit sin know no boundaries. This was a situation that confronted the worshippers who came to the tabernacle in Shiloh. Unbelief opened a door for wickedness to enter the house of the Lord. These sons of Eli were wicked men. This was what confronted Samuel as he started his ministry in the house of God. The sons of Eli abused their privilege and took portions of the offerings as they pleased. Yet, Samuel soldiered on in his service at the tabernacle. The evaluation of that state is given in 1 Samuel 2:17-18.

Samuel carried on with his duties. His mother regularly checked on his welfare. She made him a coat every year and she brought it to him every time the rest of the family went to worship in Shiloh. Regardless of the negative picture in Shiloh, Samuel knew his duty as he was a well-instructed child of his mother. Hannah’s devotion was bearing good fruit. Eli blessed both the husband and wife that the Lord would give them more children. Hannah was later blessed with three more sons and two daughters. Hannah was a spiritual heroine in her own right. Her commitment became a blessing not only to her family, but also to the nation of Israel.

The presence of sin in the Lord’s house during Hannah’s time warns us today to be vigilant and to guard ourselves that we remain committed to the Lord’s work. Hannah lived to see the Lord’s blessings on Samuel’s ministry. It is instructive to us to serve the Lord faithfully and to expect to witness His blessings. This is seen also in the Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. They followed Him when He called them, and their ministry blessed generations with the gospel. Consider what you can do for the Lord today.

THOUGHT: God’s service comes with great rewards.

PRAYER: Father, may I abhor sin and serve Thee faithfully.

THE CALL OF SAMUEL CONFIRMED

The Lord confirmed the good intention of Samuel’s mother in offering him. He called Samuel with His voice. Samuel responded, and the Lord gave him the first message. He was subsequently established as a prophet in Israel. He had matured and was ready for God’s service. The youthful prophet was thus confirmed.

Samuel ministered before Eli the priest. The text did not specify the kind of duties that he attended to as a child. He must have been involved in manual duties like arranging the furniture, sweeping the house, lighting the lamps, and even directing visitors where to find the needed services. There had to also have been some form of education for him to learn to read and write and to learn the Scriptures. He knew what he was expected to do. The parents had to have followed the Lord’s command in Deuteronomy 6 on how to teach their children. All these helped Samuel to grow and to mature in attending to the spiritual duties. It was asserted that the word of the Lord was precious, and there was no open vision (1 Sam 3:1). The call of Samuel gave him multiple tasks. He was mature enough to understand God’s message.

Eli was old, and thus he did not have full control of the affairs in the tabernacle at Shiloh. His sons took advantage and misused the privileges of the priests. But God was preparing Samuel for meaningful service. When the Lord exercises His sovereign will, all activities of men and their wishes come to nothing. As the narrative unfolded, the direction of events pointed at Samuel as the worthy successor of Eli in the Lord’s house. God’s sovereign will controlled the events that led to a change in leadership in Shiloh. Samuel was the one God had chosen even though he was young, but God was in total control.

THOUGHT: Teaching God’s Word to children is heavenly treasure.

PRAYER: Father, may Thy servants learn from the example of Samuel.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 9

1 SAMUEL 3

JEREMIAH 1:1-7

*“But the LORD said unto me,
Say not, I am a child: for thou
shalt go to all that I shall send thee.”*

THE CALL OF SAMUEL CAME IN SHILOH

The call of Samuel has similarities with that of a later prophet, Jeremiah. The call of the Lord came suddenly to Jeremiah, and he protested that he could not speak because he was a child. The Lord assured him that He had put His words in his mouth and he would declare what He would tell him. God spoke directly to prophets and raised them where they were and gave them power to speak for Him.

The Lord called Samuel at night while he was asleep. Samuel heard a clear voice calling his name. Three times this call came, and he went to Eli. He thought the priest Eli had called him. At last, Eli perceived that the Lord had called Samuel. So, he taught Samuel how to respond if the voice called him again. Since the close of the biblical canon, God does not speak through prophets, but through His written Word. The opening words of the epistle to the Hebrews were: *“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets...”* (Heb 1:1). The call of Samuel at this point showed the divine hand in the decision of his mother.

It was not long before Samuel heard God’s voice the fourth time. He responded, *“Speak; for thy servant heareth”* (1 Sam 3:10). Whenever the Lord called the prophets, His messages were usually corrective measures against those who had transgressed His commandments. The message in the call of Samuel was also bad news to Israel and the house of Eli. This was the Lord’s message in part: *“And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle”* (1 Sam 3:11). It was not a good message, and Eli the father was rebuked. God instituted corrective measures with far-reaching consequences as indicated in His message.

THOUGHT: God watches over all His people’s activities.

PRAYER: Father, may Thy Spirit fill my heart at all times that I may not sin against Thee.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 10

1 SAMUEL 3

PSALM 38:1-4

“O, LORD, rebuke me not
in thy wrath: neither chasten me
in thy hot displeasure.”

THE LORD’S MESSAGE IS CONVEYED TO ELI

It was a sad message, but it had to be conveyed. Samuel was afraid to deliver it. He had a respect both for the office of the priest and for Eli. However, Eli urged Samuel to tell him everything that the Lord had told him. Eli, in a repentant spirit, submitted to the will of the Lord. It was a reaction that Samuel did not expect. The ordination of Samuel as a prophet was spread by the people who came to Shiloh to worship. He was confirmed to that office in the whole nation and his main ministry had begun on a high note. Here is Matthew Henry’s commentary:

“What a great deal of guilt and corruption is there in us, concerning which we may say, It is the iniquity which our own heart knoweth; we are conscious to ourselves of it! Those who do not restrain the sins of others, when it is in their power to do it, make themselves partakers of the guilt, and will be charged as joining in it. In his remarkable answer to this awful sentence, Eli acknowledged that the Lord had a right to do as he saw good, being assured that he would do nothing wrong. The meekness, patience, and humility contained in those words, show that he was truly repentant; he accepted the punishment of his sin.”

The prophet Isaiah said that “*when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him*” (Isa 59:19). That is the case here. The sons of Eli turned out to be the enemies of the Lord, and Samuel was raised to deliver the nation from that wickedness. The Lord had to take corrective measures to confront their sin. It is always needful to raise a red flag when there is danger. Come out of unbelief, for God is able to provide a way of escape whenever rebellion is rife.

THOUGHT: A child of God must not be immune to sin.

PRAYER: Father, give me an obedient heart and help me to resist temptation.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 11

1 SAMUEL 4

1 JOHN 3:4-9

*“Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not:
whosoever sinneth hath not seen him...”*

GOD FULFILS HIS WORD

The Philistines were a heathen nation and thus were idol worshippers. However, in His sovereign will, God used them to punish the house of Eli, for his sons, in their sin, had defiled the house of the Lord. The Lord used the Philistines as a sword to fulfil what He had told Samuel. God is sovereign and He is able to bring His purposes to pass.

Both the armies of the Philistines and of Israel prepared for war. The Philistines and Israel were constantly in a state of war. In this incident, Israel made the first move and assembled in Ebenezer, while the Philistines were in Aphek. Israel was smitten before the Philistines. In the first round, four thousand in Israel were slain. This was the beginning of an all-out war. Israel, in their desperation, thought that the Ark of the Covenant might help them. From Shiloh, they brought it to the battlefield, thinking it might save them.

Thousands in Israel were killed in the battle that ensued. The presence of the Ark of the Covenant did not help as Israel had hoped. Though the Philistines feared the Ark, they encouraged themselves and waged a brave war. The desperate state of the nation of Israel in the midst of defeat by the enemy failed to lead them to repent before the Lord. The sons of Eli were their religious leaders and they were the culprits in the whole tragedy. The nation knew of their sins, but none protested. When they conformed in sin, there was no hope for repentance and correction.

The result of the war was that the two sons of Eli were among the casualties, and the Philistines took the Ark away. This alone served to incite great fear in Israel. When the old priest Eli heard the news, he fell down and died. The wife of one of the sons of Eli who was expecting a child developed labour pains when she heard of that tragedy. She named the child Ichabod, for the glory was departed from Israel.

THOUGHT: Sin against God is always a sin. Repentance is the only remedy.

PRAYER: Father, may I hide Thy Word in my heart that I might not sin against Thee.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 12
1 SAMUEL 4
1 JOHN 5:18-20

*“...he that is begotten of God
keepeth himself, and that
wicked one toucheth him not.”*

A FALSE HOPE DID NOT HELP ISRAEL

The Ark was a symbol of God's presence in Israel. It served its intended purpose under Moses and Joshua. It was put to its right use also under faithful priests. Israel had spiralled down spiritually that they could not distinguish between righteousness and external objects.

Israel brought the Ark to the battlefield. The depraved sons of Eli were there and they followed the Ark. When it arrived, there was a shout in the camp of Israel as they had a false hope that the physical presence of the Ark would yield some magical powers to save them. The Philistines heard the noise in the camp of Israel and they were afraid. That fear was also due to their superstition in idol worship.

The Philistines saw the Ark as something similar to their idols. They were counting themselves on the losing end because they knew how God had assisted Israel to defeat nations when they came out of Egypt. However, they could not remain passive. They encouraged themselves that they were going to fight and not be servants to Israel. Though they feared the Ark of the God of Israel, they still saw a window of victory. Israel was on the verge of defeat. It was not the strength of the Philistine army that gave them eventual victory. The text reveals that it was God who delivered Israel into the hand of the Philistines.

The two sons of Eli (Hophni and Phinehas) died as Israel was defeated. In this second phase of the battle, Israel miserably lost thirty thousand, giving a total casualty of thirty-four thousand. It was after this second phase that a messenger ran to Shiloh and informed Eli of the death of his sons. He also told Eli that the Ark of the Covenant was taken by the Philistines. When Eli heard about the Ark, he fell from the chair and died. He was too old and could not bear the news of the tragedy. The Lord's message, as conveyed to him by Samuel, had then come to pass.

THOUGHT: God's justice is served when men rebel.

PRAYER: Father, may I always walk in Thy path of righteousness.

GLORY DEPARTED FROM ISRAEL

The news of the defeat of Israel in battle with deaths of thousands was devastating. More so, the loss of the Ark of the Covenant to the hands of the Philistines was an added pain. Eli the priest fell and died when he heard the news. His daughter-in-law (the wife of Phinehas) was an expectant mother. When the news came to her, she developed labour pains. These reactions tell of the overwhelming feelings of the hearers as a result of that disaster. 1 Samuel 4:20-22 described the scene: *"And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast born a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it. And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken."* They lost hope because the Ark was a central figure in their worship. It represented God's presence among them, but then it was in the hands of the enemy. These were the consequences of disobeying God.

The spiritual health of the nation was on the decline and it began in God's house with the sons of Eli. It was for this reason that God had to bring pain upon them. God cannot overlook sin and when there is no repentance, He will mete out punishment for every sin committed. The whole history of Israel has many such examples. The golden calf episode is one example. Moses was away for forty days to meet with the Lord in Mount Sinai. When he returned, he found out that his brother Aaron had been persuaded by the people to make a golden calf. The nation then had to pay for that sin.

It is easy even for today's church leaders to slide to such levels. Watch, lest God's glory depart from your church, especially in today's ecumenical climate.

THOUGHT: Faithful teaching of God's Word and obedience to His instructions retain God's glory in the church.

PRAYER: Father, may my church ever contend for true faith without turning back.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 14

1 SAMUEL 5

DEUTERONOMY 5:6-11

*“Thou shalt have none
other gods before me.”*

THE ARK IN THE HANDS OF THE PHILISTINES

God allowed Israel to suffer defeat in the hands of the Philistines, yet He had not forsaken them. The Ark of the Covenant was taken, but God’s hand went with it against the Philistines. Though it was an object, it was a symbol of God’s presence in Israel. It was God who designed it and commanded its use.

Now the Ark was in strange hands. However, it could not be compared with an idol. The image of Dagon (the god of the Philistines) was destroyed. God also punished the cities which the Ark was taken to. Eventually, the Philistines were forced to make a decision to return the Ark to Israel. The Lord demonstrated His superiority, showing that there was no other god but Him.

The Philistines, enemies of Israel, were idolaters and they thought the Ark was like their idols too. They took it and imagined that they had taken the power from Israel. When they had won the battle against Israel, they took the Ark from Ebenezer to their city of Ashdod. This gave them the false confidence that their own idol Dagon had won against the God of Israel.

They regarded the Ark as the same as their idol, Dagon. Thus, they placed the Ark in the house of Dagon. The heathen nations had similar notions about their idols. They revered them as they believed that they had magical powers. This disqualified them as believers in the True God who made the heavens and the earth. God is particular in identifying Himself and commanding how He is to be worshipped. He taught this in the very first of the Ten Commandments: *“Thou shalt have no other gods before me”* (Exod 20:3). The Philistines had no knowledge of this truth.

THOUGHT: Our God is the only one God with distinctive attributes.

PRAYER: Father, may I study Thy Word that my knowledge of Thee may increase.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 15

1 SAMUEL 5

1 KINGS 18:36-40

*“LORD God of Abraham, Isaac,
and of Israel, let it be known this day
that thou art God in Israel...”*

THE IDOL OF THE PHILISTINES DESTROYED

Israel knew of God’s command against idolatry, but because they forsook the Lord, they were then living in a confused spiritual condition. They had neglected the book of the Law. They were also an ignorant lot. When they did not heed the words of God, they relegated themselves to the same state as nations that did not know God. This was the reason that the Lord allowed their heathen enemies to have an upper hand.

The Philistines were excited in that initial victory over Israel. They were persuaded that their idol had assisted them. Since they were ignorant of the power and the superiority of the God of Israel, they were in a celebratory mood. They attributed their win to their idol. However, the God of Israel would show His superiority over Dagon and all idols. When the Philistines brought the Ark to their land, they placed it in the house of Dagon. As they awoke the following morning, Dagon had fallen down on its face without anyone touching it. So, the priests of Dagon restored it to its place. When they woke up the second morning, Dagon had fallen again and it was reduced to pieces beside the Ark. The priests of Dagon and they of Ashdod did not go anymore into the house of Dagon. They realised that it was an extraordinary power that had brought about the destruction of Dagon.

Another such contest is recorded in 1 Kings 18 between the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Dagon was one of the many gods of the heathen nations. The Lord was able to vindicate Himself in the house of Dagon, and the priests of that shrine were put to flight. Every mention of idol worship in Israel ended up in the defeat of this false worship. This was because it was against God’s commandment and brought about stiff penalties. The Philistines knew a little about the truth of the Lord, but they did not seek to serve the God of Israel. They acknowledged His wonders, but they were not persuaded. The Lord had allowed them to take the Ark so that He could vindicate Himself.

THOUGHT: Idol worship is a denial of the true God.

PRAYER: Father, save my generation from idolatry.

GOD PUNISHED THE PHILISTINE CITIES

The hand of the Lord was heavy upon the city of Ashdod where the Ark was kept. It was also the centre of the worship of Dagon, the idol of the Philistines. God had to show His superiority and point out the error of the Philistines in retaining the Ark of the God of Israel in their midst. The people of the city were smitten with emerods. Like the plagues of Egypt at the beginning of the Exodus, the Lord let these people know that it was a mistake for them to keep the Ark of God in their midst. The Philistines recognised that plague as from the hand of the God of Israel. The God of Israel was referred to four times in 1 Samuel 5:7-8. They knew that the only way for them to be healed was to remove the Ark from their midst. It was a worthy witness on their part to know that they could not compare the God of Israel with their idols.

The Philistines were compelled to return the Ark. Initially, the people of Ashdod moved it to the city of Gath, and likewise, the people of Gath were smitten by the plague. Then they sent it to the city of Ekron, but the people of Ekron did not wait for the plague to come for they knew what had happened in the other cities. They feared and raised the alarm. At last, the Philistines agreed to return the Ark to Israel. Many of the Philistines by then had died or were smitten by emerods. It could be said here that the Ark was equivalent to thousands of well-armed soldiers who could easily win a war. The Philistines were not resistant like the Egyptians in the Exodus plagues. They initiated a means of sending the Ark back to Israel. They learned their lesson well.

God is sovereign and does all things after the counsel of His own will. He does not need any defence from men. He is able to speak to defend Himself. He is all powerful. He is the true God, and He is just in all His dealings. We need to know Him and His plan for our salvation. When we believe, no enemy can defeat us. The offer of salvation in Christ is our hope of freedom from sin.

THOUGHT: God was gracious to the unbelieving nation.

PRAYER: Father, may Thy grace abide with me that I may persevere to the end.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17

1 SAMUEL 6

ACTS 17:20-27

*“That they should seek the Lord,
if haply they might feel after him,
and find him...”*

THE ARK RETURNED TO ISRAEL

It could be said that the Ark of the Covenant fought its own war and compelled the Philistines to return it to Israel. It was however the Lord Himself who punished the Philistines. They knew that the attacks they faced were because of the Ark of the Covenant. The painful vengeance made the Philistines acknowledge the superiority of the God of Israel. It also made them offer a token to seek forgiveness.

The Philistines returned the Ark of the Covenant. They sent it with two cows that pulled the cart. The men of Israel welcomed the return of the Ark with joy. Israel also had to be careful in handling that sacred object. It was not an idol. It was an important object in the sacrificial form of worship. Its spiritual use was valid because it was God who ordered it.

When the Philistines returned the Ark, it had been in their land for seven months. Throughout that period, the Philistines did not have any peace. They knew that the Ark was the cause. They resolved among themselves to return it to Israel. Though the Philistines did not know or worship the God of Israel, they were religious and had priests and diviners. They consulted them on how they should return it to Israel.

The religious leaders advised them not to return the Ark empty. 1 Samuel 6:3: *“And they said, If ye send away the ark of the God of Israel, send it not empty; but in any wise return him a trespass offering: then ye shall be healed, and it shall be known to you why his hand is not removed from you.”* They advised them to send five golden emerods and five golden mice in order to be healed. They knew that they had transgressed the sanctity of the God of Israel and the right use of the Ark. Their trespass offering was a means of seeking forgiveness. Though they had mixed perception about God, at least their priests knew that something had to be done to appease the true Divine.

THOUGHT: The Law of God is written in the heart of man.

PRAYER: Father, may the nations uphold Thy truth revealed in Thy Word.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 18

1 SAMUEL 6

PROVERBS 9:9-10

*“Give instruction to a wise man,
and he will be yet wiser...”*

THE INNOVATION OF THE PHILISTINES

The images of emeralds and mice made of gold were the inventions of the Philistines. However, they were made of precious substance and this was their worth. Thus, even the Philistine priests counselled the leaders of the affected cities to send the Ark back with valuable trespass offerings that would reflect their sincerity. The Philistines knew that the God of Israel was all powerful. They had initially fought against Israel and won and were able to take the Ark from them. However, this turned out to be the beginning of another contest between their idols and the God of Israel. They had to surrender and return the Ark.

The significance of the golden emeralds and mice was the plagues that attacked the Philistines and the common rodents in their land. The priests and diviners who decided on making their images of gold for the trespass offering had their reasons. They also advised the Philistines to give glory to the God of Israel as they were seeking forgiveness from Him. The power of the God of Israel that they had witnessed subdued their will and they yielded. When they did so, they said that the God of Israel would lighten His hand upon them and their gods. Their understanding of God was still very limited, but they were willing to submit. The priests warned the Philistines against hardening their hearts as the Egyptians. That mention of the wonders of the Exodus showed that these people were not ignorant of the true God. This was so because God had not left Himself without a witness in every nation. The Ark of the Covenant became a witness to them in those circumstances.

God's work can only be done God's way. Both the Philistines and the people of Israel had to learn God's lesson the hard way. This was so that only God's purposes should govern their actions. They needed to live a holy life and serve the Lord with honesty. Good knowledge of God's Word today will teach us all these basics and we can relate well with the Lord as we wait for His eternal reward. Let us obey Him.

THOUGHT: Everything that God made bears witness for Him.

PRAYER: Father, may I bear witness for Thee every day of my life.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 19

1 SAMUEL 7

ROMANS 1:18-23

*“For the wrath of God is revealed
from heaven against all ungodliness
and unrighteousness of men...”*

THE ARK FOUND REST AS ISRAEL WAS WARNED

As the Ark was returned to Israel, it first came to Bethshemesh. As it was not given the deserved treatment, the people of that city were punished. The men of Kirjathjearim came to fetch it. They brought it to the house of Abinadab on a hill. These men had learnt their lesson, and they handled the sacred object with due respect.

Eleazar the son was set apart to keep the Ark. In contrast, the men of Bethshemesh had not given the Ark the right treatment. The Ark remained there for twenty years and it served its purpose then. The settling of the Ark in Kirjathjearim was a new beginning in Israel. It was a reminder to them that the Lord was in their midst. The fate of the men of Bethshemesh was a warning to them on handling holy things. Settling it rightly in the new home brought sanctity to the nation.

Samuel was then established as a prophet and judge of the nation. He stood out as a transitional leader from judges to kings. He told Israel to turn to the Lord and put away idolatry. The nation was not fully free from that temptation. The period of judges was a carefree era in which everyone did that which was right in their own eyes. The nations around them did not know God, and idolatry was their religion. The interaction with them in matters of daily life had great influence on Israel. They were ensnared by idols. The depravity of the human heart easily caused Israel to forget the Lord and to turn to idols. This was not the first time that idolatry became a spiritual problem to the nation. Even during the wilderness wandering, they were tempted. That temptation followed the nation everywhere. The Lord constantly warned them to flee idolatry.

THOUGHT: Revival comes with the rejection of common sins.

PRAYER: Father, help me to overcome ignorance and remain faithful to Thee.

LORD'S DAY, OCTOBER 20
1 SAMUEL 7
2 TIMOTHY 1:1-5

*"...the unfeigned faith that is in thee,
which dwelt first in thy grandmother
Lois, and thy mother Eunice."*

SAMUEL PREACHED AGAINST FALSE GODS

Israel adopted strange gods, and Samuel told them to put those strange gods away and prepare their hearts to serve the Lord only. When they turned to the Lord, He would free them from the Philistines. Samuel knew that it was punishment from the Lord that He had delivered them into the Philistines' hands. The people of Israel were then willing to obey Samuel.

Samuel called for a public gathering in Mizpah. He told them that he would pray to the Lord for them. He knew that the solution to Israel's problem was to seek God. At the death of Eli, Samuel was still a child but he was serving in God's house. The text is silent about the details following the death of Eli, but here, Samuel was in full control as a leader of national affairs. His spiritual growth and leadership ability came from the Lord. His mother Hannah had played a great part in influencing him to serve the Lord. She was a woman of prayer and faith. Mothers, take note and pray for your children.

Samuel understood that he had to correct the wrong that the nation had done before they could be reconciled to God. The basic correction is to point out the sins of the people. This is followed by seeking forgiveness from God. Thus, the people were then gathered in Mizpah and they drew water and poured it before the Lord. It is not indicated why they poured the water, but that was part of their act of worship. They also fasted that day. Fasting is also part of the expression of sincerity. This came naturally to Israel because they had given their hearts to God. The obstacle of sin had to be removed, so they confessed that they had sinned against the Lord, and sought forgiveness. That was also the beginning of Samuel's ministry as a judge to the nation.

THOUGHT: It takes a leader who fears God to rescue a nation.

PRAYER: Father, raise leaders among us who truly fear Thee.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 21

1 SAMUEL 7:7-17

EPHESIANS 6:10-18

*“Put on the whole armour of God,
that ye may be able to stand
against the wiles of the devil.”*

THE PHILISTINES WERE SUBDUED BEFORE ISRAEL

The Philistines reacted to Samuel's move in Mizpeh. They prepared to fight another war with Israel. Israel was afraid of such a challenge. Their readiness must not be with the might of the flesh. It must be a spiritual preparation. They had a spiritual leader who was mature and understood their predicament.

They asked Samuel not to cease to pray to the LORD for them. In this, He would save them from the hands of the Philistines. Samuel then approached the LORD in the best way he knew. He took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering and the LORD heard him. The answer was instant.

Samuel was conversant with the right worship, and he did accordingly. Now that a prophet was in the midst of the nation, the LORD's presence among them became evident. The Philistines were all set to fight with Israel. On the other hand, Samuel did not tell Israel to prepare to fight. While Samuel was offering up the sacrifices, the Philistines drew near. It was then that the LORD thundered with great thunder on that day against the Philistines. They were discomfited and smitten before Israel. The LORD fought for His nation. Israel then went out of Mizpeh and finished off what was left of the Philistines. Israel saw the hand of the LORD and remained confident.

Samuel was now the judge and spiritual leader that the nation looked up to. The Philistines were subdued all his days. They came no more to the coasts of Israel for the hand of the LORD was against them. The cities that were taken were restored to Israel. The whole nation of Israel looked to Samuel as their judge. He was capable and established an effective administrative order.

Good leaders that fear God are worthy of any nation. God gives revival and establishes good leadership. The church must also follow this pattern.

THOUGHT: The Lord leads the righteous in the paths of peace.

PRAYER: Father, may my confidence be in Thee in my spiritual battles.

ISRAEL ASKED FOR A KING

The history of Israel was heading for a change as Samuel got old and made his sons judges. They discharged their duties in Beersheba, and their names were Joel and Abiah. They did not walk in the ways of their father. They loved money, took bribes and perverted judgment. The elders of Israel gathered themselves and petitioned Samuel. They told him that his sons were not walking in God's ways. The conduct of his sons was not satisfactory to the people of Israel. They complained to Samuel because his sons' dishonesty made them incompetent as judges.

They asked for a king to judge them. Samuel disagreed with their request and prayed to the Lord about it. The Lord told him to accept their request, and at the same time protest against that move. He said that in making the request, they had not rejected Samuel, but they had rejected the Lord to be judge over them. He told Samuel of the disadvantages of having a king. The people persisted, and the Lord agreed to appoint a king for them.

The life history of Samuel started from the time his mother prayed before he was conceived. He was born and nursed by his mother as a baby. She also made a vow before the Lord to give her child to serve in the house of the Lord. Samuel served in the house of the Lord all his life. The Lord called him as a child and he served Him. His sons, on the other hand, did not have the same experience as their father. They had no fear of the Lord. They lived worldly lives and gave in to temptations. They set a bad example. Such must not be allowed to continue.

THOUGHT: History repeats itself when the saints are not careful.

PRAYER: Father, may our next generation have good leaders in the church.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23

1 SAMUEL 8

1 PETER 2:13-17

“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake.”

ISRAEL ASKED SAMUEL FOR A KING

The sons of Samuel were judges, yet they misused their office. They were entrusted with a responsibility, but they yielded to the temptation to sell justice. Such a situation is not uncommon even today, but it comes with negative consequences. It is immoral to do so. The concern of the elders of Israel was valid.

It is imperative to abide by the Law of God, whether in public service or in private. The Westminster Confession of Faith, in a statement on civil government, says that it is lawful for Christians to accept and carry out the duties of a public office when called upon to do so, in which case, it becomes their responsibility to maintain justice and peace in accordance with sound laws of kingdoms and states they serve. Men of God in every generation and nation are thus admonished to heed this responsibility, and this was what the sons of Samuel needed to do. More reactions to their conduct followed as the elders raised their concern.

Israel asked for a king and Samuel was not pleased with the request. He perceived that it was not the will of the Lord for the nation to have a king. He prayed to the Lord about it. The Lord’s will was agreeable with Samuel’s concern. In asking for a king, Israel in effect was rejecting God as their king. It had been nearly four hundred years since Israel came out of Egypt, and the Lord had been their king all along. Nevertheless, the Lord told Samuel to hearken to their voice, for they had not rejected him but the Lord. He pointed out that their main problem was sin. They faced the temptation to serve other gods. God told Samuel to protest solemnly against their request.

The Lord agreed to their request, but He chided them because such a move was out of pride, and they were not fully trusting Him. Samuel conveyed the Lord’s message, and told them the negative aspects of having a king.

It is always wise to seek and confirm the will of the Lord.

THOUGHT: God’s will for every nation is the best will.

PRAYER: Father, bless our land and nation.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 24
1 SAMUEL 8
MATTHEW 8:23-27

*“What manner of man is this,
that even the winds and
the sea obey him!”*

THE PEOPLE PERSISTED IN WANTING A KING

The king that Israel was asking for would not improve their welfare. The description, in short, showed that the king they wanted would be a dictator who would oppress the people and not protect their rights.

He would make their young men riders of his chariots and horsemen and some would run before his chariots. Some would be appointed commanders of the king's army and some labourers in the king's fields. They would be smiths to make his instruments of war. Their daughters would be confectionaries, cooks and bakers. He would also take their fields for himself. Samuel fell short of telling them that the king they were asking for would make slaves of them. Thus, instead of prestige and pride that they expected from having a king, they would be in bondage. He gave them a picture of what life would be like under a king who would not be a spiritual leader like Samuel or Moses was. He warned them that they would regret their resolve to have a king. But they had already made up their mind.

They refused to obey the voice of Samuel. They were determined in wanting a king. No words could change them; they had resolved with finality that they wanted a king. In effect, they rejected God's voice. Samuel heard them and told this to the Lord. The Lord told Samuel to hearken to their voice and set a king for them. The spirit of dissatisfaction and complaint was common to Israel from the time that they came out of Egypt. They needed repentance and transformation in order that they might submit in obedience to the Lord.

The new generation needs to follow the old in righteousness. God must always lead and be obeyed. This is how blessings would come.

THOUGHT: Anything that the Lord does not approve of will become a disaster.

PRAYER: Father, teach me to know that obedience is the beginning of good things.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25

1 SAMUEL 9:1-27

ACTS 1:23-26

*“And they gave forth their lots;
and the lot fell upon Matthias.”*

GOD CHOSE SAUL TO BE KING

Israel wanted a king and the Lord consented to their request.

Saul left home with a servant looking for the lost asses. When they could not find them after much searching, they decided to consult prophet Samuel who was commonly known as the seer. When prophet Samuel met with Saul, the Lord told the prophet that Saul was the one whom He had chosen to rule His people. Samuel understood the unfolding events. He revealed to Saul and the servant that their asses were found, but he had another appointment for Saul. He indicated to Saul that he had been chosen to lead the nation. He was thus set for that appointment.

The events leading to the naming of Saul as king unfolded, although he was not a likely king at face value. Saul was the son of Kish of the tribe of Benjamin. In Genesis 49, before Jacob died in Egypt, there was the prophetic blessing of Jacob on all his twelve sons. It seemed that the leadership of the nation would be given to the house of Joseph because God had honoured him and used him to bring Israel to Egypt. Or it could have been given to the house of Reuben by virtue of Reuben being the first born, or Judah as designated by Jacob. Therefore, when the appointment was revealed to Saul (of the tribe of Benjamin), he raised an objection about the designation of the royal line.

Then, the nation was settled in Canaan, and they wanted a king. The choice was puzzling to Samuel and the nation. As the story of the nation unfolded, things became clearer to them. The son of Kish of the tribe of Benjamin was designated as the king. Benjamin was the youngest son of Jacob, and the possibility of the appointment of a king from the tribe was remote. However, the unfolding events were headed in that direction, regardless of the recent history of the tribe (re: Judges 20-21). It was the Lord's choice. Thus, Saul was set to become the king of Israel.

THOUGHT: Any appointment to a place of authority is from the Lord.

PRAYER: Father, give us discernment in choosing our leaders.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26

1 SAMUEL 9

1 PETER 2:13-17

“Honor all men.

Love the brotherhood,

Fear God. Honour the king.”

SAUL REVEALED AS THE CHOICE

God had spoken to Samuel to make His choice known. God led Saul to where He wanted him to be. Saul and his servant left home to look for his lost asses. After three days, Saul told the servant that his father would worry not about the asses but be worried about their whereabouts. They were running short of their provisions and still had not found the asses.

Saul's servant was reliable and thoughtful. He told Saul that there was a man of God in that city commonly referred to as the seer. He said that the seer would be able to tell them where the asses were. They needed to bring a gift for the man of God when they went to see him. The servant said that he had the fourth part of a shekel of silver and that would be sufficient as a gift to the man of God. Matthew Henry commented that Samuel needed not their money, nor would he have denied his advice even if they had not brought any gift. But they gave it to Samuel as a token of respect and the value they put upon his office. God was guiding their steps without their knowledge. They went to look for the man of God. At the same time, Samuel was also expecting them as the Lord had showed him.

They went to the city and inquired where the seer would be. The people of the city were familiar with Samuel's movement, so they gave Saul and his servant clear direction. It was not long before Saul and Samuel came face to face. When Saul appeared, the Lord identified him to Samuel, that he was the one chosen to lead Israel. Samuel handled that period of transition in Israel from the rule by judges to the rule by the king. When Saul was confirmed as king, the necessary procedures were to be put in place. It was for Samuel then to fulfil his part until the king sat on the throne. Samuel indicated to Saul that he had been chosen of God to be the king of Israel. Saul was not prepared for that revelation, but speech could not change what God had planned for him. Samuel continued to prepare him for the great day.

THOUGHT: Where trust in God is present, there is clear guidance and revelation.

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for making known Thy eternal plan.

SAUL ANOINTED TO BE KING

Samuel took steps to anoint Saul whom the Lord had chosen to be king in Israel. He anointed Saul privately and pronounced him king. He revealed to him what would follow until the process was completed. He had to be introduced publicly and the process of the appointment formalised. Samuel revealed to Saul the signs of confirmation. Saul was *“turned into another man”* (1 Sam 10:6) as the Spirit of the Lord came upon him.

When Samuel anointed Saul, he told him step by step what would follow after his departure from Samuel. Samuel told Saul to go to the plain of Tabor, and that three men would meet him and would give him two loaves of bread. They would then come to the hill of God where there was a garrison of the Philistines. In the city, he would meet a company of prophets with musical instruments and they would prophesy. Saul would also prophesy with them.

The new office had multiple responsibilities. Saul had to trust in God fully. This would enable him to carry out the task of being a king. Samuel conveyed the Lord's message to Saul and had to convince him that the Lord was truly on his side. The appointment to the highest office in the land was no mean feat. The Lord assured him that He would give him the ability to manage all his duties (1 Sam 10:7).

When the nation requested for a king, they were measuring themselves against the nations around them, and they were motivated by pride. They wanted to be like the other nations. God's leadership among them was not sufficient for them. They wanted to give themselves credit for standing tall among the nations. The Lord told Samuel to protest against their request to have a king. The signs that God gave were meant to discourage Saul from thinking that he could lead the nation on his own.

Samuel had to speak to Saul authoritatively. He guided him until he was ready for the office of his calling. Saul was just a young man looking after his father's livestock. He was then propelled into the highest office in the land.

THOUGHT: God is able to use anyone to fulfil His purposes.

PRAYER: Father, affirm my faith in Thee in all that the Bible teaches.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 28

1 SAMUEL 10

PROVERBS 25:11

*“A word fitly spoken is like apples
of gold in pictures of silver.”*

THE PREPARATIONS TO CONFIRM SAUL AS KING

Samuel instructed Saul to go to Gilgal and tarry there seven days. He would then come, offer burnt offerings and peace offerings, and show him what to do. He always offered these in worship. The worship of God was an exercise that could not be separated from all service for Him.

It was when Saul turned from Samuel to go back that God gave him another heart, resulting in another disposition of mind. All the signs that Samuel had told him came to pass. The Spirit of God came upon Saul and he prophesied. This led to an outward show of devotion, and a sudden change for the present. The people wondered if Saul was *“among the prophets”* (1 Sam 10:11).

Saul’s appointment as king was a special one. Even though Israel wanted to be like other nations, there was a great difference in the selection of the king. Saul had to know that the nation of Israel was especially chosen of God. He was also to assume his office under God’s leading.

The people saw the new king among the prophets. These prophets were people who spoke for God. Noticing his association with the prophets, the people asked questions about him. Saul then went to the high place (1 Sam 10:13). At that time, he had not been revealed publicly as king and the people referred to him as the son of Kish. Saul’s uncle met him and asked where he had been. Saul simply told him that he and his servant were looking for his father’s asses, but when they could not find them, they went to see Samuel. He did not tell his uncle all that Samuel had told him, but merely reported that Samuel told them that the asses had been found.

THOUGHT: Important matters can only be revealed at the right time.

PRAYER: Father, may I be wise and discerning to speak the right things at the right time.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 29
1 SAMUEL 10
DEUTERONOMY 17:14-20

*“Thou shalt in any wise
set him king over thee, whom the
LORD thy God shall choose...”*

SAUL PUBLICLY REVEALED AS KING

Saul did not mention the matter of the kingdom to his uncle. However, preparations to make known the new king continued.

In Samuel's address to the nation at Mizpeh, he continued to protest against Israel's request for a king. He had told them earlier the demerits of having a king. He reminded them that their move was motivated by carnal desire. Nevertheless, the Lord granted their request. Samuel told them that they had a new king, and introduced him to them. The people were surprised that their new king (Saul, the son of Kish) came from the tribe of Benjamin. Samuel asked the people to fetch him where he had hidden and he was made to stand before the people. *“And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king”* (1 Sam 10:24). He ended the process as he put these in writing in a book. They then went home and there was mixed reaction. But Israel had their first king.

God is sovereign, and He does all things after the counsel of His own will. He holds the future in His hands. He raises one king and puts down another. We need to always submit to God's revealed will.

THOUGHT: God leads Israel, and all nations, in His eternal plan.

PRAYER: Father, may all our activities agree with Thy will.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 30

1 SAMUEL 11

PSALM 73:1-6

“Truly God is good to Israel...”

A WAR IN THE MAKING FOR THE NEW KING

One of the primary duties of a king is to protect the nation against its enemies. This was to be Saul's first task as the king of Israel. The Ammonites were set to fight Israel, and they posed a strong challenge. Israel then was not strong enough to face the aggressor. The threat of war by the Ammonites would be a test of Saul's ability to lead his nation. This is the order of events that eventually thrust Saul into his first war.

The history of kings in Israel speaks of many wars that these kings had to fight. This was a way of life in those ancient days. Israel was a nation chosen by God to show His power and for His witness. Almost every king that is mentioned had to fight a war with foreign enemies. The biblical record shows the hand of God in all their involvements. Saul, being the first king, began his reign with a war; at last, he also ended his life in a war.

The aggressive Nahash, king of the Ammonites, encamped against Jabeshgilead, one of the territories of Israel. During the time of judges, each tribal region had some autonomy. When they faced common enemies, the nation would unite. The appointment of Saul as king was not to one tribe but to the whole nation of Israel. Many kings in those days offered terms of peace at first, but when this step failed, they would then resort to war. This was what Nahash did in this narrative. The men of Jabeshgilead asked him for a covenant. This was a kind of treaty that placed conditions on another nation. The Ammonite king felt that he had an upper hand. He would have the right to enslave the weaker nation. Thus, he gave the men of Israel a punitive condition. The men of Jabesh asked for seven days to seek help from all Israel. They saw that it was not worthy of them to surrender and suffer after hearing the words of the Ammonites. This was what brought the whole nation together. Israel had a history of the hand of God fighting for them.

THOUGHT: God was Israel's immediate help amidst threat.

PRAYER: Father, help me to always remember that Thou art the same yesterday, today and forever.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 31

1 SAMUEL 11

ISAIAH 25:1-4

*"I will praise thy name;
for thou hast done
wonderful things..."*

SAUL THE NEW KING CAME INTO THE PICTURE

The threat of the Ammonites was reported to all Israel, and this came to the ears of Saul. He was in his city of Gibeah when the messengers came and reported the sad news. As a new king, he probably saw an opportunity to demonstrate that he was capable of military action, and that he was a worthy king. The rest of the people of Israel heard of this threat and wept for they foresaw painful days.

The Ammonites waited for Israel's response, assured of victory. They did not know that victory in any war depended on God. Saul, the son of Kish, was now a legitimate king who had the Spirit of the Lord to guide him. The Spirit came upon him and he was greatly angered. He also knew that it was his primary duty as king to protect his nation from any aggression. He was like a lion that had smelt his prey. He moved swiftly and sent a strong message to all Israel. He took a yoke of oxen and hewed it to pieces and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel. He ordered everyone in the nation to follow him and Samuel, and whosoever would not do so would have his oxen suffer the same fate. His message was clear to the people. The fear of the Lord came upon the people, and they all came to King Saul in one accord.

As a king, he had to have military skills. He knew what to do in the situation that presented itself before him. He also understood the mind of the people and how to exercise authority over them. In this instance, there was a spontaneous response to his authority. The people did not respond to him as Saul, but to his authority as king. Samuel was still on the scene because the new king needed his assistance. The people still trusted Samuel and they knew that he was speaking for God. They were now set to move into action and help the king fulfil his mandate of protecting the nation. They were ready to obey the orders of the king.

THOUGHT: God never forsakes His appointed servants.

PRAYER: Father, grant wisdom to Thy servants.

SAUL GATHERED AN ARMY TO FIGHT THE AMMONITES

The Ammonites had declared war on Israel and were waiting for the appointed time to move into action. King Saul numbered his people. There were more than three hundred thousand. All able men came to form that huge army.

The men of Jabeshgilead, who went to Saul for help, returned with a good report (1 Sam 11:9). The promise was that they were going to get help against the Ammonites the following day. In the meantime, the new king organised that huge army and was set to fight and overcome the enemy. The Ammonites soon found out that they had entirely underestimated the ability of Israel. The men of Jabeshgilead were now confident that they were going to defeat the enemy. There was gladness in Jabeshgilead because their hearts were encouraged by the good report. This was to be Saul's first war as king of Israel.

The main lesson in this account is not the skill of Israel or the new king, but God. The doctrine of the sovereignty of God is a truth that is taught in the Bible. It applies to all activities of man. However, God has not revealed the purpose of everything. He guides and determines the final outcome. Thus far, King Saul was set to face the Ammonites.

Israel fought with the Ammonites and defeated them. Saul also pardoned those who opposed him in Israel because he wanted the nation to be united. God's eternal plan ensured that the nation was always secure. It is God who raises and puts down those who lead.

THOUGHT: Every achievement that God's people make is attributed to His eternal plan.

PRAYER: Father, may Thy prophets and chosen leaders faithfully lead Thy people in paths of righteousness.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2

1 SAMUEL 12

PSALM 1

*“Blessed is the man that walketh not
in the counsel of the ungodly...”*

SAMUEL CONFIRMED SAUL IN HIS FAREWELL SPEECH

Samuel continued to guide Israel as the new king consolidated his power. It was a period of transition and the prophet was still held in high esteem. The nation listened to and obeyed him. They recognised that Samuel was God’s spokesman. Though he still did not agree that they should ask for a king, he admonished them to be faithful and to obey the Lord. He told the nation that the Lord would not forsake them. He confirmed Saul publicly as king. This communication also turned out to be his farewell speech, for the prophet would henceforth play a minimal role in the affairs of the nation.

He addressed the nation saying that he had hearkened to their voice for a king. He justified himself on the basis of his integrity. He challenged them to speak ought against him. He appealed to the Lord as a witness for him. He had fulfilled the duties of his calling faithfully. He spoke with confidence because the Lord had guided him. He was an example to all Israel. His address was an instruction to Israel. The people bore witness of his testimony that it was true. He appealed to the past works of the Lord that He had done thus far, beginning with the rescue of the nation from Egypt.

Nearly four hundred years had passed since the Exodus, and generations had come and gone, but the witness was still fresh. Samuel referred to those earlier experiences to charge the nation that the people must never forsake the Lord. Samuel became the last judge of Israel.

When Israel asked for a king, Samuel was taken aback. He took more time to admonish them to walk closer with the Lord. He was qualified and had the authority to speak because of his lifelong walk with the Lord. As his mother offered him to serve in the house of the Lord, he became a worthy servant of the Lord all his life.

THOUGHT: Samuel is a hero of faith because he walked with God.

PRAYER: Father, may I follow the footsteps of Thy faithful saints.

A REVIEW OF THE PERIOD OF JUDGES

Samuel prepared the nation for a new era under the king by reminding them that whenever they forgot the Lord, they were subjected to foreign nations. He recalled the time under the judges to remind them that the Lord was their leader. They were not to be proud and compare themselves with other nations. They had to acknowledge the Lord at all times.

The prophet reviewed that era by mentioning some highlights. Sisera the captain of the host of Hazor was mentioned. This was the captain that Barak (with guidance from prophetess Deborah) overcame, and Sisera was killed by Jael. Two women were involved in the victory of Israel, and Sisera was defeated. God's hand aided Israel. It was a stupendous historical record. After this victory, unfortunately, the nation again turned to idolatry. Thus, they were delivered to their enemies every time. Samuel took time to recount how that generation had failed and had to be punished as they turned away from the Lord. He told of the victories of Jerubbaal and Jephthah. Both these men did not have leadership background. Jerubbaal (i.e. Gideon) spoke of himself and his family as the least in Israel (Judg 6:15), yet the Lord used him greatly to deliver Israel from their enemies. Jephthah was also seen by his family as an illegitimate son (Judg 11:2), but the Lord raised him to be a strong military leader.

All these were the works of the Lord that Israel was familiar with. However, they wanted to have their own way. The latest enemy was Nahash, the king of the Ammonites. They came against Israel and the war against him became the first test for King Saul. The Lord showed that King Saul, with God's help, was capable of defending the nation against any aggressive nation.

It was a peaceful transition from the period of judges to kings as Samuel was guided by divine wisdom. A new era had dawned on Israel, yet the Lord remained the same Lord of Israel.

THOUGHT: A worthy leader can come only by divine appointment.

PRAYER: Father, raise up good leaders that we may live peaceably.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 4

1 SAMUEL 12:13-25

PSALM 99

*“...they called upon the LORD,
and he answered them.”*

ISRAEL WITH SAUL AS THE NEW KING

Samuel affirmed and introduced Saul as the legitimate king of the nation. He had been appointed by the Lord as per the people's request. The prophet then charged the nation to be foremost in following the Lord.

The main emphasis in Samuel's words to the nation was obedience to the Lord. Proverbs 21:1 says, *“The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.”* Thus, obedience to a king is obedience to God. Samuel knew this, and he stressed this fact. Though he was not in agreement with Israel's persistence to have a king, God's sovereignty overruled and the prophet was told to anoint a king for them.

Samuel showed how the Lord had blessed the nation. His hand was not only seen in giving victory at war, there were also many general blessings. It was a time for wheat harvest, and Samuel said that he would pray to the Lord to send thunder and rain. He also pointed out that God had tolerated them and given them a king as per their request. Rain and thunder are forces of nature. Samuel appealed to these wonders to show Israel the hand of God.

Samuel also urged the nation to follow the Lord more. They were not to turn aside to follow vain things which could not profit nor deliver them. He assured them that the Lord would not forsake His people for His own name's sake. Samuel pledged to unceasingly pray for them, counting negligence to pray as sin. Thus, he was committed to pray for the nation and her king. He pledged to continue to teach them God's way. In all these, Samuel fulfilled his duty before the nation.

THOUGHT: Samuel's godly testimony from birth to old age is clear to all.

PRAYER: Father, may I strive to pass Thy test and leave a good testimony.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 5

1 SAMUEL 13

1 PETER 2:13-17

*“Submit yourselves
to every ordinance
of man for the Lord’s sake...”*

EARLY SUCCESSES AND FAILURES OF SAUL

King Saul was settled in his position as king of Israel. He had to protect the nation from external aggressors. The threat of the Philistines was real. This neighbouring nation was unfriendly and had military superiority. Israel was a small nation and lacked military equipment. The new king strove to organise the army. In this initial stage, there were successes and failures.

Saul was God’s appointee and Samuel expected him to learn to depend on the Lord. Saul was put to a test when Samuel was delayed arriving at the appointed time to offer sacrifices as they gathered in Gilgal. The Philistines were getting ready to attack, and Saul failed the test. That was the beginning of his fall.

Saul had reigned for two years and had organised his army. Saul worked hard to raise an army that was capable of fighting any war. His eldest son Jonathan (who would ordinarily be designated the heir to the father’s throne) was mature enough to command an army.

Jonathan was assigned to lead a section of the soldiers. He led a thousand in Gibeah of Benjamin. He smote a garrison of the Philistines in Geba. Saul blew the trumpet to call Israel together. The information went out quickly and all Israel were called to Saul in Gilgal. The king was consolidating his power and striving hard to prove that he was a dependable leader. He was now visible, and an order was getting established. The king was learning leadership on the job. Nevertheless, he had to heed the word of Samuel who had anointed him. Samuel kept an eye on Saul and sought to correct him whenever he went wrong.

THOUGHT: God gives wisdom to those whom He has chosen to lead.

PRAYER: Father, grant us leaders who fear Thee.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 6

1 SAMUEL 13

PROVERBS 27:1-6

*“Boast not thyself of to morrow;
for thou knowest not what
a day may bring forth.”*

WEAKNESSES OF SAUL BEGAN TO SHOW

Saul was king, but he could do little without guidance from the Lord and from Samuel as God's representative. The disadvantage of having a king was beginning to appear. Israel was a unique nation and was not to be compared with other nations. However, the people, in their pride and ignorance, had insisted that they wanted a king. Saul's weaknesses began to show.

God had mercy on the nation because they were not able to judge themselves rightly. However, they soon knew that they could not rely on their own power to stand as a nation. Samuel, as a prophet of the Lord, had initially objected to their request for a king, but the Lord overruled him. God told him to accede to their request. At this point, the king was headed for failure. The Lord allowed them to learn their lesson the hard way. Samuel represented a spiritual approach to leadership while Saul represented the carnal approach.

The neighbouring Philistines were an immediate problem. They gathered a large army and chariots, and were determined and confident to fight and overcome the infant army of Saul. They had chariots and horsemen and a large army. They came towards Israel and were set to fight. Israel realised that they were at a disadvantage. They could not fight the Philistines. They thus hid in caves, thickets and rocks. Some of them fled beyond Jordan. Saul was in Gilgal and the people that followed him were greatly frightened.

Samuel was delayed in coming to Saul at the appointed time to offer burnt offerings. The people who were with Saul were scattered from him. The king was impatient and took it upon himself to offer sacrifices. It was unlawful for him to take upon himself that sacred duty.

THOUGHT: The leader of God's people must not be carnally minded.

PRAYER: Father, guide our decisions in fulfilling our sacred duties.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 7
1 SAMUEL 13
2 CHRONICLES 26:16-21

*“...his heart was lifted up to his
destruction: for he transgressed
against the LORD his God...”*

SAUL'S FIRST FAILURE LED TO REJECTION

The responsibility of protecting the nation entails fighting wars to keep away the enemies. This requires raising and sustaining a strong army. When facing the enemy, the soldiers carry arms. These are not just for display; they have to be used when necessary for self-defence. This duty of defending one's nation fell on Saul.

However, Saul's hurried action in offering the burnt offering was the beginning of his departure from the throne. When Samuel arrived, he asked Saul what he had done. Saul disclosed his fears. Samuel told him that he had done foolishly because he did not keep God's commandments. If he had obeyed, the Lord would have established him in Israel. However, because of his disobedience, his reign would not continue.

Samuel announced that the Lord had sought for a man who was after His own heart. Consequently, the kingdom was taken from Saul. In today's second reading, King Uzziah of Judah also did what Saul had done. He was stricken with leprosy and remained a leper for the rest of his life. These examples show the need to absolutely obey the Lord. Nobody must take upon himself any holy office without meeting lawful requirements.

Saul and his son Jonathan remained in Gibeah. The enemies were getting ready to attack. Israel was disadvantaged as the Philistines had removed the smiths (1 Sam 13:19). They were dependent on the Philistines for their iron instruments. Thus, in time of war, they were in a losing position. The events here again showed Israel and their king that they needed the Lord to uphold their kingdom.

THOUGHT: The Lord is indeed the real power in sustaining His people.
PRAYER: Father, may I have the determination to stand for Thee against sin.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8
1 SAMUEL 14:1-23
NUMBERS 13:30-33

*“...Let us go up at once,
and possess it; for we are
well able to overcome it.”*

JONATHAN DEMONSTRATED LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

Jonathan, the eldest son of Saul, was a responsible young man. If the throne of Israel had continued in the house of Saul, he would have been a better king than his father. He ventured into the Philistine garrison. He went only with his armourbearer. He was able to attack the enemy forces by a strategy he had devised. That initial act became the first step to Israel's victory against the Philistines. The hand of the Lord was evident in guiding him to victory.

In facing the Philistines, Jonathan's remarks showed that he believed that the Lord was able to save (1 Sam 14:6). This revealed his character and his faith in the God of Israel. He was a man of courage, for it was almost impossible for two people to face an army and win. He was persuaded that all things were possible with God. Jonathan made his intent known to his armourbearer who agreed with him, and was brave enough to venture with him. Two great minds saw victory in a totally unpromising situation.

Jonathan, son of a king, had the privilege of making decisions on his own without consulting his father. He wisely made use of his position. The Philistines said that the Hebrews were coming out of the holes where they had been hiding. Jonathan approached the enemy trusting God. The heart of Jonathan was courageous as that of Moses and Joshua. He was knowledgeable of how the Lord had assisted their nation in defeating their enemies.

The Lord had told Samuel that He had been their king. He used the early leaders and judges to guide the nation and protected it from external attacks. In any war, there will be a winner and a loser. However, like all events of human activity, it is the Lord who determines the outcome. He is King and Ruler of the universe.

THOUGHT: God's assistance does not depend on circumstances.

PRAYER: Father, grant me wisdom and courage to fulfil my duties for Thee.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9
1 SAMUEL 14:1-23
HEBREWS 11:1-6

*“Now faith is the substance
of things hoped for,
the evidence of things not seen.”*

THE STEP OF FAITH FRIGHTENS THE ENEMY

When believers exercise their faith concerning a specific matter and trust in God, He will be there for them. This was the case in the activities of Jonathan in this account. He was fully persuaded that the hand of the Lord would assist them. His armourbearer obeyed him. It was an encouragement to Jonathan. He was persuaded that the Lord would deliver the Philistines into their hand.

Jonathan and his armourbearer caused great fear in the enemy's camp. As indicated earlier, every victory in a war begins with a heart that trusts in God. And as real combat follows, so too will success. This is godly “thinking outside the box.” In this case, it was God's wisdom and not man's imagination that gave victory to the two-man army. In the first battle, Jonathan and his armourbearer slew twenty men.

In their communication, Jonathan affirmed that the Lord had delivered the enemy into the hand of Israel. That initial success gave them more courage to fight on as they had all the signs of success. There was panic in the host of the Philistines, and they trembled and the earth quaked. This was an added supernatural assistance and confirmation that the power from above was there for them. The two were encouraged by the turn of events and did not turn back nor call for any assistance from his father's men. The enemy was also confused and unwilling to offer any resistance because they thought Jonathan had many men behind him. Jonathan trusted the Lord to be with them.

The power of God is never limited. On the human plane, the situations may render us helpless. Without faith, we despair and give up. However, when we remember God in our hearts, it gives us courage in the time of our greatest need.

THOUGHT: Courage is a godly virtue for all who contend for the faith.
PRAYER: Father, may my eyes of faith see the invisible.

LORD'S DAY, NOVEMBER 10

1 SAMUEL 14:1-23

PROVERBS 25:2-8

*“Put not forth thyself
in the presence of the king, and
stand not in the place of great men.”*

GOD CAN INTERVENE

The watchmen of Saul in Gibeah saw the multitude melting away and they went on beating down one another (1 Sam 14:16). The king had no information of what his son had done. The king ordered the people that were with him to be numbered. He wanted to find out who was missing. That was when they discovered that Jonathan and his armourbearer were missing. In the meantime, the duo was heading for victory.

It would have been treason for any other soldier to have deserted the king and take personal initiative to confront the enemy. The order had to come from the king. However, Jonathan used his privilege as the son of the king. At the same time, he did not misuse that position. He used it to the advantage of the nation. He assumed moral responsibility, and trusted the Lord. He worked for the good of his people. Most importantly, it was an exceptional act because the hand of God was there.

The Philistines were confused and they turned against themselves. In addition, the Hebrews who lived among the Philistines also supported Israel. Thus, the Lord saved Israel that day.

The act of Jonathan showed his understanding of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God and human responsibility. God intervenes in the activities of men to bring His purposes to pass. This may be in the form of a miracle or just guiding the individuals and inclining their thinking to that which is agreeable to God's will. Jonathan did his part, trusting that God would help them. Indeed, God *“saved Israel that day”* (1 Sam 14:23). The historical portions of the Bible are full of examples that substantiate this fact.

THOUGHT: In times of despair, God can do great things for His people.

PRAYER: Father, may every faithful spiritual leader stand on Thy promises and have good success.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 11
1 SAMUEL 14:24-52
ECCLESIASTES 2:24-26

*“There is nothing better for a man, than
that he should eat and drink, and that he
should make his soul enjoy good in his labour.”*

SAUL'S INDECISIVE LEADERSHIP HURT HIS ARMY

King Saul gave an order that had its shortcomings. Jonathan did not hear when Saul forbade the people with an oath to eat anything. It was eventually revealed that Jonathan had tasted honey in the bush. He was not aware of Saul's oath that forbade satisfying the appetite for food.

In the midst of fighting with his enemies, Saul adjured the people with a curse that they should not taste anything for a whole day. While the king said this, Jonathan was out battling the Philistines and the Lord gave him great victory. His two-men army did great exploits. Many of the people knew about Jonathan's success in weakening the enemy. This gave an advantage to the army of Israel which the king led. As they went to battle, they had to adhere to the charge of the king. Any violation of the oath was punishable by death.

King Saul did not reason wisely, because going for a whole day without food for an army is suicidal. Jonathan understood this, but the people were afraid of the order of the king. There was much honey in the way they passed in the bush. However, they could not touch it for fear of the oath. The king did not give a thought to the condition of his men being in a warfront and deprived of that physical necessity. Seeking the mind of the Lord before making an oath would be much better.

THOUGHT: Good leadership requires wise and godly foresight.

PRAYER: Father, grant the leaders of Thy people much wisdom.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12

1 SAMUEL 14:24-52

2 CORINTHIANS 1:23-24

*"...I call God for a
record upon my soul..."*

THE DISADVANTAGE OF SAUL'S OATH

In scripture, taking an oath is a valid exercise. However, since God's name is invoked, the individual who takes it must fulfil it. In Israel, it was a universal law, and everyone knew the consequences of violating such a declaration. It is used today to confirm acceptance of a public office and also to bear true witness in a court of law. It is thus a solemn act that nobody should take lightly. In any circumstance, its implications must be taken into account. King Saul, in this instance, did not give due consideration before making the people take the oath.

The oath made the people uncomfortable and less confident. Since Jonathan was not aware of the oath, it was a natural thing for him to help himself to the honey that was available in plenty. He tasted the honey and he was enlightened. Honey is a nutritious food which can satisfy weary soldiers. If the men had eaten, they would have lasted longer in the battlefield, resulting in a greater victory (1 Sam 14:30). Saul was a poor strategist in war. Jonathan was more capable, but there was a limit to what he could do. The people noticed Jonathan eating the honey and informed him of the king's charge. He commented that it was not the right thing to do. At that time, the people were faint because of hunger. Jonathan told the people that he was enlightened when he tasted the honey. It would have greatly assisted the weary bodies of the people if they had eaten the honey too. Furthermore, the people would have done more in war against the Philistines. Every army marches on their full belly. Saul missed the opportunity when he made that order.

God's intervention was needful at this point as there was disorder among the people. They flew upon the spoils, and they slew sheep and oxen and ate with blood. These people were too hungry to remember the law that forbade the eating of blood. It was then reported to King Saul that the people had sinned against the Lord by eating their meat with blood. The king then gave a new order to remind the people that they should not sin in eating their meat with blood.

THOUGHT: An oath is the last resort in the affirmation of a truth.

PRAYER: Father, grant me the grace always to keep my oaths.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 13

1 SAMUEL 14:24-52

JAMES 3:13-18

“...let him shew
out of a good conversation
his works with meekness of wisdom.”

SAUL'S NEW BATTLE WITH THE PHILISTINES

The king thereafter remembered the Lord and he built an altar to Him. This was an affirmation on his part that Israel worshipped Jehovah.

The king gave an order to his men to go after the Philistines at night. The people were agreeable and were ready, but at this point, a priest intervened. He asked them to draw near to God first. Thus, the king asked the Lord if it was the right time to fight the Philistines. All was not well with Israel, and it was not wise to go after the Philistines without putting their house in order. The matter of the oath was not over. The king heard that someone had violated his oath. It was a sin to do so, and inquiry was made. It was discovered that it was the king's son who had done so. This was punishable by death. Jonathan acknowledged tasting the honey and was ready to die. The king also affirmed that Jonathan had to die. The people intervened and overruled the king to save Jonathan's life. The basis of their defense was that Jonathan had delivered victory to the nation in fighting alone and winning. The people overturned the king's decision.

In the epilogue, Saul's style of leadership is summed up. He continued to fight many wars against the enemies. He fought long battles with the Philistines and built a strong army. The family of the king and his senior officers in the kingdom are listed. He had three sons, two daughters and one wife. When the Lord appointed Saul to be king, He knew of his weaknesses and He bestowed grace so that he was able to lead.

THOUGHT: Man is limited in his decisions, but God is sovereign.

PRAYER: Father, teach me in decision-making to seek Thy mind.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 14

1 SAMUEL 15:1-9

PSALM 128

*“Blessed is every one
that feareth the LORD;
that walketh in his ways.”*

SAUL'S INCOMPLETE OBEDIENCE (1)

The office of a king in Israel, as in any nation, is very important. Any weakness on the part of the person who occupies the throne can cause much harm to the nation. Saul underestimated his office and failed to fully obey the commandment of the Lord given through Samuel. The failure of Saul would lead to far-reaching consequences. It would become a lesson not only to the king, but to all Israel. The commandment of the Lord is absolute. As such, everyone must give due heed to the words of God.

Saul had then been king for some time, and he had fought many wars with the enemy nations around Israel. He had gained recognition and obedience from his subjects. Though he had many weaknesses and failures, he was anointed of the Lord as king. As he continued in his task of leading the nation, the Lord sent Samuel to convey an important message to him. All the commandments of the Lord were specific, as it was in the time of Moses and Joshua. The recipient had to take God's commands very carefully.

The king was commanded to avenge them of the Amalekites. This was to be vengeance against them for they had laid in wait for Israel when Israel came out of Egypt. This punishment was delayed all those years, but the time had come. The command was clear. Saul was to kill every living creature in the city of Amalek.

Saul was quick to respond. He gathered the men of Israel by their thousands in Telaim. They were ready to attack the city of Amalek. He separated the Kenites from the Amalekites and told them to go out of Amalek lest they would be destroyed together. The Kenites were credited for the kindness they had showed to the children of Israel when they came out of Egypt. They were obedient and separated from the Amalekites.

THOUGHT: God's justice is shown in the punishing of the rightful offenders.

PRAYER: Father, may I obey all Thy commands.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15

1 SAMUEL 15

ROMANS 13:1-4

*“Let every soul be subject unto
the higher powers...”*

SAUL'S INCOMPLETE OBEDIENCE (2)

After that separation, Saul smote the Amalekites. Israel attacked in a large territory and overcame them. Saul had won but he began to modify the commandment of the Lord.

They took Agag the king alive. In addition, they took the best of the sheep, fatlings, lambs, oxen and all that was good. The people of Israel did this with Saul's full approval. This was directly against the command of the Lord. The office of a king is a key position and the performance of the king depended on how he kept the commandments and guided the people in war. The Lord gave Israel victory in that war. But the initial failure of Saul pointed at the direction his future would go. Saul needed to know that he had to seek wisdom from God in order that his rule would not fail. In this instance, he chose human wisdom over God's instructions.

The road to rejection began. The word of the Lord came to Saul through Samuel. It was not pleasant news to the king. It came because of his disobedience. was obvious. The Lord said to Samuel over this matter, *“It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the LORD all night”* (1 Sam 15:11). The Lord rejected Saul, and Samuel was grieved.

Samuel then sought for Saul, and the king reported that he had performed the commandment of the Lord. The Lord had spoken to Samuel, and the prophet also witnessed what the king had done. Samuel knew all that had happened and he spoke to Saul to show him the mind of the Lord. Saul should have learnt the lesson from Achan in the time of Joshua. Saul failed in this regard.

THOUGHT: Effective leadership comes by wise counsel.

PRAYER: Father, may I not ignore the counsel of Thy Word.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16

1 SAMUEL 15:10-35

HEBREWS 12:25-29

*“See that ye refuse not him
that speaketh.”*

GOD REJECTED SAUL AS KING

As a consequence of Saul’s disobedience, the Lord said, *“It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king...”* (1 Sam 15:11). Gill commented, *“This is not to be understood of any change of mind, counsel, purpose, or decree in God, which is not consistent with his unchangeable nature; but of a change of dispensation, and outward dealings, and is spoken after the manner of men, who, when they repent of anything, change the course of their conduct and behaviour; and so the Lord does without any change of his mind and will, which alters not; and though he changes the outward dispensations of his providence, yet he never changes and alters in the matters and methods of his grace; though he repented he made Saul king...”* (Source: John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible)

The disobedience was obvious. Samuel could hear the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen. When Samuel came to Saul, the king appeared innocent and declared before Samuel that he had performed the commandment of the Lord (1 Sam 15:13). Then Samuel asked where the bleating of sheep and the lowing of oxen came from. Saul justified his actions of sparing them by saying that the people were going to sacrifice to the Lord God (1 Sam 15:15). The command was to destroy till they were consumed, but Saul modified God’s command. He spared those animals and also King Agag because he feared the people. He was assured of victory in the war, but his disregard of God’s command made him a failure as king.

Samuel said to Saul, *“Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams”* (1 Sam 15:22). It was a sin on the part of the king. His rebellion was like witchcraft and stubbornness. Saul tried to hold on to Samuel, and his skirt was rent. Samuel pronounced this as a sign of the renting of the kingdom from him. The rejection of Saul was complete as he did not understand that kingship required total obedience to God.

THOUGHT: In spiritual leadership or any such position, obedience to God must take a prominent place.

PRAYER: Father, help Thy children to take heed to all Thy commands.

DAVID ANOINTED AS THE SPIRIT LEFT SAUL

The removal of Saul from the throne of Israel was a process that brought about a transition without hindering the peace of the nation. God rejected Saul and gradually removed him from office. In his place, He appointed David, the son of Jesse, as king-in-waiting. The Lord sent Samuel to privately anoint David. The Spirit of the Lord left Saul, but he continued as king for some time. David was invited to Saul's household as a harpist to cheer the king. This also gave David an experience of royalty. The Lord presided over the transition, and David was headed for Israel's throne.

There were specific failures that made it necessary for Saul to vacate the office of king. Ultimately, it was the sovereign hand of God. When Saul was anointed king of Israel, it was God's choice. At that time, Israel had been in the Land of Canaan for nearly four hundred years without a king. God was their King and He guided the nation through different leaders. Saul was also an unlikely king when he was chosen.

The Lord had given Moses the qualifications of a king in Israel, but it took that long for them to finally have a king. The message to Samuel to anoint David came by the will of the eternal God. Samuel was commanded to go to Bethlehem to anoint one of the sons of Jesse as king. Samuel was hesitant because he was afraid of Saul, but the Lord gave him direction that would not raise any suspicion. He went with a heifer and called Jesse and the family to the sacrifice that he intended to offer. When the people of the city saw Samuel, they feared. But the prophet assured them that all was well. He then organised to make a sacrifice with Jesse and his sons.

In the Old Testament order, all worship had to include a sacrifice. Samuel had the authority from the Lord as a priest, and he was a leader. The current sacrifice was also meant to conceal the main reason for Samuel's coming. The Lord had guided him as he went to fulfil this mission.

THOUGHT: God is always sovereign.

PRAYER: Father, may we submit to Thy will in the choice of leaders.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 18

1 SAMUEL 16

GENESIS 49:8-12

*“The sceptre shall not depart
from Judah, nor a lawgiver
from between his feet...”*

THE RIGHTFUL KING OF ISRAEL IN THE MAKING

God chose the house of Judah as the dynasty to rule in Israel. This was indicated in the blessings of Jacob to his twelve sons. This was not fulfilled when Saul was anointed king. God was going to fulfil that promise in the anointing of David. He came from the house of Judah. The dynasty lasted for twenty generations. The nation then went into captivity.

The true King in Israel is Jesus Christ the Lord. He came as a servant and fulfilled the offices of a prophet and priest. In His second coming which is yet to take place, He will come as King. He will then fulfil that prophecy. He is commonly referred to as the Son of David. The anointing of David to be king thus carried a great significance.

The Lord chose David from among the sons of Jesse. In an earthly monarchy, the eldest son usually inherits the throne from the father. Samuel had assumed that that would be the order when he was sent to Bethlehem. He informed Jesse of his mission and invited him to the sacrifice. Jesse had assumed that the Lord would choose his eldest son to be king. The Lord was with Samuel. When Eliab (Jesse's eldest son) came, Samuel thought he was the right choice, but the Lord said no. The Lord told Samuel not to look on appearance, for the LORD looks on the heart. The prophet understood the mind of the Lord. Jesse made all his seven sons present to pass by one by one, but Samuel said that the Lord had chosen none of them. Samuel then inquired from Jesse if he had any other sons. Jesse said that there was one young one who was looking after the sheep. Samuel told him that they would not do anything until this youngest son had come. Jesse sent for David, and the Lord told Samuel that David was the one to be anointed. Samuel arose and anointed David as king-in-waiting.

THOUGHT: God never changes His order of events.

PRAYER: Father, increase my faith in Thy promises.

THE LORD PREPARED DAVID TO BE KING

The anointing of David was not known to Saul. His public revelation would come later. The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and an evil spirit came upon him. His servants suggested that they seek a musician to cheer him. The king consented to the servants' suggestion. He asked them to provide a man who could play the harp well and bring that person to him. They then proposed David. This happened without Saul's knowledge that David had been anointed as king. However, all these were under God's control. At this point, the matter was concealed from Saul and the people of Israel.

David was then invited to Saul's palace. The king sent messengers to Jesse asking him to send David his son. Jesse took an ass laden with bread, a bottle of wine and a kid, and sent David with these to pay homage to the king. Thus, David became part of Saul's household. He was a multi-talented young man. He was ready in his heart for any challenge. He did not simply play music, he became part of the king's army as well. He was the armourbearer of the king himself. This could have been the highest rank in the military, and David was up to that challenge.

The king was pleased with David's performance. He sent a message to Jesse again, asking that David should stand before him. As David found favour in the sight of Saul, he was integrated into the household of the king. In the background was the unseen hand of God at work. David was destined for greater things. He faithfully fulfilled his duties so that when the evil spirit came upon Saul, David continued to play the harp for the king. The king was thus refreshed and was well. It was then that the evil spirit departed from the king.

THOUGHT: God's unseen hand is always at work.

PRAYER: Father, may I always be aware that Thou art with me.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20

1 SAMUEL 17:1-28

PSALM 18:1-5

*“The LORD is my rock, and
my fortress, and my deliverer;
my God, my strength...”*

GOD WAS WITH DAVID AS HE FACED GOLIATH

David's victory over the Philistine giant, Goliath, is one of the best known Bible stories. David had gone back to Bethlehem while his three brothers had gone with Saul to battle with the Philistines. Their father sent David to bring food to his brothers at the war front. He came at a time when the Philistine giant, Goliath, was challenging Israel to send a champion to fight with him. King Saul offered a reward to anyone who could kill the Philistine giant. David overheard Goliath's words of challenge. He then made an inquiry and they told him the king's words. He offered to fight Goliath, but his eldest brother (Eliab) was angry with him. Also, King Saul did not believe him. David spoke confidently, trusting that the Lord would help him. In the end, he smote Goliath with one stone, and God gave Israel victory.

When the Philistines gathered against King Saul and Israel, the two armies faced each other on what was part of the land of Israel. They took their positions in a place suitable for each, on a mountain with a valley between them. Goliath was a powerful Philistine champion. He was more than nine feet tall, and was fully armed for war. He had sufficient protection and the best weapons of war: spear, sword and shield. With his stature and weapons, he was frightful-looking. He challenged the army of Israel to choose a man who would fight with him. If he defeated them, Israel would be their servants. And if Israel won, the Philistines would then be their servants. Goliath set these threatening terms. He spoke with much pride because, to him, the victory over Israel was a forgone conclusion. At the same time, Saul and Israel were dismayed. The men of Israel saw Goliath and fled from him, sore afraid.

Jesse's three eldest sons had joined Saul in the war front. Eliab was the eldest and there were Abinadab and Shammah. David was the youngest of eight sons. He was King Saul's assistant and music player, but he had gone back to Bethlehem. David's return to visit Bethlehem confirmed the providence of God as it led to him being sent to the battlefield.

THOUGHT: God does all things well.

PRAYER: Father, may I always have confidence in Thee.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 21

1 SAMUEL 17:1-28

PSALM 101:1-5

*“I will behave myself wisely
in a perfect way...”*

DAVID PROMISED TO KILL THE PHILISTINE

At the battlefield, Goliath drew near every morning and evening and presented himself for forty days. The army of Israel was kept in suspense as they did not know what to do. When Jesse sent David to bring food to his brothers, he obeyed and left the sheep with the keeper and went his way. He did not realise the significance of that trip.

David came to the place where the army of Israel was facing the Philistines. The threat of defeat for Israel was real; he heard what the Philistine champion said. The men of Israel were greatly frightened and they fled from the Philistine. All in Israel remained at the battlefield not because they hoped to win, but because they were simply obeying orders from their commander. They had already surrendered in their hearts. They did not know that courage to the end was needed for success in any war. David was not enlisted in Saul's army. However, when he heard the words of Goliath, he wanted victory for Israel. His secret was his faith in God.

David was told that any man who could kill the Philistine, the king will enrich him with *“...great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel”* (1 Sam 17:25). It was a generous offer, but none of them in Israel was willing to take up that challenge. David saw beyond the fear that filled the hearts of the army of Israel. He was determined to take away the reproach from Israel. He called Goliath the uncircumcised Philistine who defied the army of the living God.

David pinned his hopes on God, not on external might. His trust in God was his hope, and he saw victory for Israel. He spoke to the people that stood around him to confirm what the king had promised as a reward for the person who would kill the Philistine giant, and take the reproach away from Israel. The people affirmed the king's promise. His brother, Eliab, was not supportive. He chided him with bitter words, but David was not discouraged.

THOUGHT: I must always fear God.

PRAYER: Father, may I always see hope in difficult circumstances, for Thou art my source of comfort and assurance.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 22

1 SAMUEL 17:29-58

PSALM 103:1-5

*“Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits.”*

DAVID SLEW GOLIATH USING WHAT SUITED HIM

In response to his brother's objections, David rhetorically asked, *“What have I now done? Is there not a cause?”* (1 Sam 17:29). Finally, it was brought to the attention of the king that David was willing to fight and kill Goliath. David then said to the king that no man's heart should fail, and that he was ready to go and fight the Philistine. He spoke with confidence that he was going to kill the giant. He backed his hope with a testimony of his experience as a shepherd. When a lion and a bear threatened to kill his lamb, he killed them with his bare hands and saved the lamb. He thus affirmed that he would likewise slay the giant. Thus, the king gave him the green light to go after Goliath. David might have been a lad whom others despised, but at heart he was more mature than the king. And he was the king-in-waiting.

King Saul offered David his armour, sword and helmet. David tried them on, but refused to use them (1 Sam 17:38-39). He had his shepherd's staff, a bag and a sling. He went to the brook and gathered five smooth stones and put them in his bag. These were enough for him. Goliath derided David and cursed him in the name of his gods. David said that Goliath was coming after him with shield and spear, but he depended on the God of the armies of Israel. He declared that the battle was the Lord's. He affirmed that all those gathered would know that the Lord did not save by the sword, and that all the earth would know that *“there is a God in Israel”* (1 Sam 17:46).

David slew the giant at his very first attempt. Although he had gathered five stones from the brook, he needed to use only one and the giant was dead. David was victorious, and all witnessed it. The Israelite army was greatly encouraged and they chased the Philistines to their own cities and slew them. God made David a new hero in Israel. A past experience with God became a sample of a new achievement. David knew all along that with God all was possible.

THOUGHT: Attempt great things for God, achieve great things for Him.

PRAYER: Father, give me a heart like David's.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 23

1 SAMUEL 18

1 PETER 2:13-17

“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme.”

DAVID WAS SET TO BE KING OF ISRAEL

After the slaying of the Philistine giant, Jonathan (Saul’s son) showed his love for David. They sealed their friendship with a covenant. However, King Saul then developed a negative attitude towards David and plotted to get rid of him. He was offended that all Israel loved David. He intended to kill David by the sword of the Philistines, thus he sent him to the battlefield more often.

David did not shy away from war. He won every time. Saul also offered him one of his daughters to be his wife, but it was with the intention to ensnare him. When the king asked for one hundred foreskins of the Philistines as a condition for him to marry his daughter, David was pleased and he doubled the number that the king had asked for. Thus, he married Saul’s daughter.

Jonathan’s friendship with David was a brotherly one. As the son of Saul, Jonathan was the rightful heir to the throne. However, the popularity of David with the nation was a cause for worry for King Saul. He expected his son to succeed him, but as the events unfolded, they did not seem to be on the same page. Jonathan loved David and had also identified David as the future king. He knew that David would be the next king of Israel, and was willing to relinquish the throne to him. The covenant they made was a very clear indication that God’s choice was David.

David was a king-in-waiting because Samuel had already privately anointed him to that office. The action of Jonathan was God’s peaceful way of transition. His speech and actions fell short of proclaiming David as king. The surrender of his robe and armour was quite telling of Jonathan’s regard for David. The unfolding of events all pointed to David as the successor of Saul. David already knew that he was going to be king but he did not act unlawfully. He was waiting on the Lord to show him the right time to take over the throne.

THOUGHT: God’s appointment is final, no man can change it.

PRAYER: Father, choose for us worthy national leaders.

DAVID BECAME POPULAR

It is stated that David behaved wisely. He went wherever King Saul sent him to. And all Israel loved him. That victory in slaying Goliath put him in the limelight. He rose from a shepherd boy to a national hero. He showed that he trusted and depended on God, and that was the first quality required of a king. Every nation wanted peace and freedom. Saul had done what he could, but he was not able to defeat Goliath. David offered to face that challenge. He was destined to be king, for God had chosen him.

When David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, there was a spontaneous welcome with song. The public reaction to David's victory was echoed in the women's singing where they attributed the slaying of thousands to Saul and ten thousands to David. This displeased Saul greatly, and he eyed David from that day. Saul was not ignored as a king, but he perceived that he was losing ground with the nation. He anticipated David's ascension to the throne in the days ahead, but he viewed this with suspicion and malice. He also knew that Jonathan his son was sympathetic to David, and was willing to give up the throne for him.

Regardless of Saul's attitude, David continued to serve him faithfully. He was loyal and attended to his assigned duties. He played music for the king and went to battle as he was assigned. He was in the presence of the king whenever he was required. The whole nation knew that he was a capable leader. David avoided Saul's two attempts to kill him. God was with David, but He departed from Saul. All Israel loved David and he himself behaved responsibly. Everything turned in David's favour, and Saul was afraid, but there was little he could do. The Scripture says that God has foreordained all that will come to pass according to His sovereign will. In many instances, God's dealings with men revealed His will. He will always prevail regardless of circumstances.

THOUGHT: Faith comes with complete confidence in God.

PRAYER: Father, lead and guide me according to Thy will for me, as I trust in Thee.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 25

1 SAMUEL 18

EPHESIANS 6:10-17

*“...be strong in the Lord,
and in the power of his might.”*

DAVID WON ALL HIS BATTLES

Saul tried all means to get rid of David. He thought that David's constant presence in the battlefield would eventually lead to his death in the hands of the enemies. He offered his daughter to David for a wife. This was Saul's way of keeping David within reach to eventually have him killed. David, however, was up for any challenge. The king told his servants to talk to David about his offer of his daughter. Knowing that David might not be able to afford a dowry, the king, through his servants, offered him an alternative. Saul did not require a dowry. Instead he asked for one hundred foreskins of the Philistines. His intention was for David to die in the hands of the Philistines as he fought. David was delighted with that offer.

David slew two hundred Philistines. That was twice the number that Saul had asked for. David was given the second daughter of Saul, Michal, for a wife. All things worked together for good. God was with David, and he was not afraid of any venture. He trusted the Lord in trying circumstances, such as the evil intentions of Saul.

The future king was aware of what Saul was doing, but he responded with godliness and wisdom. He behaved with humility when he was offered Saul's daughter for a wife. He said that he was not worthy to be the king's son-in-law. God was with David and ensured he did not fail. This was proven beyond doubt earlier when he valiantly slew the Philistine giant. Saul was afraid of David, because David behaved wisely (1 Sam 18:12-14).

As these events took place, David had already been anointed to be king. God caused Jonathan, the apparent successor of Saul, to be David's best friend. Saul was determined to get rid of David, but God protected him and gave him success.

THOUGHT: God is the Source of all wisdom. He can be trusted.

PRAYER: Father, may I put on Thy whole armour, and grant me victory in my spiritual battles.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 26

1 SAMUEL 19

GALATIANS 5:19-21

*“Now the works of the flesh
are manifest...”*

JONATHAN SAVED DAVID’S LIFE

Saul knew that David was destined to be king after him. However, he had a carnal outlook and refused to see David ascend to the throne. He gave orders to his son and his servants to kill David. When his attempts failed, he looked for another convenient occasion. He sent messengers to his house to slay him there, but David’s wife assisted in his escape. David then fled to Samuel’s house to seek refuge there. God protected him all the way as the king tried every means to see that he died. The Lord continued to use the friendship of David and Jonathan to secure his life. Both Samuel and Jonathan knew that David would be king, and King Saul had seen it coming and that became a cause for his hatred for David.

Saul spoke outrightly to his son Jonathan and his servants to kill David. He came up with that idea because he feared losing the throne. At the same time, he wanted the future king of Israel to come from his lineage. Saul’s intention was what is known as political assassination. It came out of ambition and jealousy. In scripture, such acts are classified as works of the flesh. The king was driven by such depravity in his heart as to shed innocent blood. He should have known that the privilege to lead a nation was a favour of God. He himself was not born into a royal family, but God picked him out of nowhere and told Samuel to anoint him king. It was his own misconduct that led to his rejection.

While Saul struggled to deal with David, Jonathan loved David and acted to protect him from his father. He spoke well of David before the king, imploring his father not to sin against his servant because he had not sinned against him. David had risked his life to protect the nation and he had killed Goliath. The Lord had used him to bring salvation to Israel. Even the king himself had rejoiced over that victory. Jonathan told him that he would be sinning against innocent blood if he slew David. These words of Jonathan were able to persuade the king to rethink his earlier order, for Saul hearkened to the voice of Jonathan. He swore by the Lord that David would not be slain. Jonathan kept David informed, and their friendship remained.

THOUGHT: One needs to be bold in defending the truth.

PRAYER: Father, may Thy truth be seen in all my relationships.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27

1 SAMUEL 19

PSALM 55:19-23

*“Cast thy burden upon the LORD,
and he shall sustain thee...”*

DAVID’S CHARACTER WAS HIS CREDIBILITY

Saul knew that David was innocent. The slaying of Goliath caused the whole nation to love David. It was difficult for King Saul to remove that impact that it had on all Israel. It was only Saul who was negative towards David. Jonathan brought David back into the presence of Saul. That mediation seemed to improve the relationship, but inwardly Saul was not willing to be reconciled to David. The wise behaviour and abilities of David was far more convincing to everybody. He was a dependable person.

David was always at the battlefield. The immediate enemies were the Philistines. Saul was frustrated about dealing with David because he behaved wisely. There was war with the Philistines, and David fought and slew them in a great slaughter, and won the battle. On the other hand, Saul was controlled by an evil spirit and was preoccupied with killing David. David came into Saul’s presence, and played music for him. Then Saul sought to smite David with a javelin. David was able to avoid getting hit. The weapon hit the wall instead.

The attempt alarmed David to the fact that Saul had not given up in his determination to kill him. David expected he would die in the hands of Saul any time. The evil spirit that came upon Saul made him act in an irrational manner. He was deprived of common sense, and he was unpredictable. From then, David did not take any chances to be exposed to Saul. He fled from Saul’s presence and escaped that night. This ushered in a hide-and-seek race between the two. The whole matter was centred on the throne of Israel. David knew that he was going to be king, but this had not been made known publicly. On the other hand, the king was able to see signs of David becoming king. The only way he thought to prevent him was to kill him, but God was in control of all events.

THOUGHT: The Lord is a refuge to the righteous.

PRAYER: Father, assure me of Thy protection when I am in danger.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 28

1 SAMUEL 19

PROVERBS 16:20-29

*“There is a way that seemeth right
unto a man, but the end thereof
are the ways of death.”*

SAUL ATTEMPTED AGAIN TO KILL DAVID

The king sent messengers to David's house to kill him. He enlisted Michal's help. However, she chose to stand with David and saved his life. She informed David of the plot. They agreed on a plan of escape. Michal then took an image and laid it on David's bed. When Saul's messengers came to take him, she told them that he was sick. The king ordered David to be brought to him on his bed. Then, they discovered that David was not there. Saul plainly called David his enemy. Michal said that David had to run away to avoid death. By God's grace, David's life was spared. In his relentless pursuit of David's life, human depravity brought out the worst in Saul.

Samuel was a prophet of God, and the last judge before Israel was given a king. He was the one sent by God to anoint Saul as king. He thus oversaw the transition of the nation from judge to king. When Saul was rejected, Samuel was also sent to anoint David as the next king. It was thus logical for David, when faced with danger, to run to Samuel. When he arrived, he told Samuel all that Saul had done to him. He was welcomed and they went to dwell together in Naioth, which was also in Ramah. Saul had spies everywhere and it was told him that David was with Samuel. Saul sent messengers to take David. Yet again, the Lord acted to protect David. The messengers, instead of seeking David, joined the prophets and prophesied.

It was not specified exactly what happened, but it was obvious that the messengers were made to forget their mission and spoke for God. The second group did the same. At last Saul himself came, but he also prophesied.

The Lord used Jonathan and Michal to save David. Through this, the hand of the Lord was manifested. Trust and obey, and God will always protect you.

THOUGHT: Do I trust the Lord to be my refuge?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, that I can always run to Thee.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 29

1 SAMUEL 20

PROVERBS 17:17

*“A friend loveth at all times,
and a brother is born for adversity.”*

JONATHAN AND DAVID CONFIRMED THEIR COVENANT

Saul had declared an all-out war for the throne of Israel. David had been divinely protected in Ramah when Saul wanted to capture him. Then he moved out and sought for Jonathan. Fleeing from Ramah, David came to Jonathan. He said that he was sure of his death in the hands of Saul any time. Jonathan was apologetic and was committed to save the life of David. They both made a plan for his escape. Jonathan promised to inform him of Saul's plans. Jonathan and David renewed their covenant. They made the Lord a witness between them.

The truth was known only to the two. David was buying time to avoid the wrath of Saul. Jonathan told David that if he knew that evil was determined by his father against him, he would tell him immediately. They resolved to seek a means of communicating without letting anyone know their secret.

Every time Jonathan and David conversed, each was guided by the solemn commitment to their friendship. Jonathan knew that David was destined to be king. The Spirit of God worked in his heart, so he was aware. Though this had not been made public, the key persons knew of this truth. Jonathan understood this and was willing to submit to what he recognised as God's will. He cooperated with David and made a covenant with him. That commitment could come only from a regenerated heart.

Saul noticed after two days that David was missing in his place at the dinner table. David had decided not to appear at dinner time as he was afraid of the king. He had already told Jonathan to inform the king that he had gone for a family sacrifice at Bethlehem. So, when Saul asked for David's whereabouts, Jonathan told him the reason for David's absence and that he had sought permission from him to go to his home city. The king was very angry.

THOUGHT: True love can come only from a regenerated heart.

PRAYER: Father, may I love my brethren as David and Jonathan.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 30

1 SAMUEL 20

PSALM 1

*“Blessed is the man
that walketh not in the
counsel of the ungodly...”*

DAVID AND JONATHAN MADE PLANS TO COMMUNICATE

David and Jonathan went to the field and made plans on how they would converse. Jonathan prayed to the Lord God of Israel, and told David that he would seek to learn from his father how he would respond regarding David. He would then send word to David. He again invoked the name of the Lord in making his promise to David. He wished him the presence of the Lord. He also asked David to show Saul the kindness of the Lord while he still lived. Having said this, Jonathan caused David to swear again because he loved him as he loved his own soul. It was a solemn moment for them, and they were of the same mind.

David and Jonathan agreed to meet after three days by the stone Ezel. They devised and agreed on a coded message according to Jonathan's plan. This was the message: *“And I will shoot three arrows on the side thereof, as though I shot at a mark. And, behold, I will send a lad, saying, Go, find out the arrows. If I expressly say unto the lad, Behold, the arrows are on this side of thee, take them; then come thou: for there is peace to thee, and no hurt; as the LORD liveth. But if I say thus unto the young man, Behold, the arrows are beyond thee; go thy way: for the LORD hath sent thee away”* (1 Sam 20:20-22). Jonathan stressed that only the Lord was between them in their covenant. Thereafter, David went his way and hid in the field.

Jonathan was a leader in his own right, and above this, he feared the Lord. His conduct in this matter revealed his heart. He was a man of war, and the use of coded messages in times of conflict was part of his training. He was also a principled person, so that he was able to defy his father in an important decision. Though it pleased the Lord to take the throne of the nation from him and give it to David, he was entirely satisfied with the Lord's decision. He reacted wisely and took everything with a heart of humility.

THOUGHT: Godly leadership requires one to stand by the truth always.

PRAYER: Father, may my conduct be ever truthful and exemplary.

JONATHAN DEFENDED DAVID

After conversing with Jonathan, David departed and his place was empty at the dinner table. On the second day, the king inquired of him. Jonathan told him that David had sought leave to go to Bethlehem. At this answer, the king turned his wrath upon Jonathan saying, *“Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and unto the confusion of thy mother’s nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom. Wherefore now send and fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die”* (1 Sam 20:30-31).

Jonathan then rose to the defense of his friend and asked his father why David had to die when he had done nothing to deserve that sentence. Saul was angry with his son’s answer. In his rage, he took a javelin to smite Jonathan. It was then that Jonathan knew his father was determined to slay David. Jonathan was also angry with his father, and did not eat for the shame of what his father had done. He must have passed that night without sleep. Jonathan’s desire was for the welfare of David.

In the morning, Jonathan was in the field to see David at the appointed time. He had a little lad with him. He put into action what they had agreed in the coded message. The lad collected the arrows as he was told, but did not know anything about the communication between David and Jonathan. Jonathan then sent the lad back to the city. This was the scene of what would be the last meeting between Jonathan and David: *“And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of a place toward the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times: and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded”* (1 Sam 20:41). Jonathan wished David peace and affirmed that their covenant would remain intact. The Lord was their witness. The great friends then parted.

The Lord sustained David and saved him from many dangers.

THOUGHT: The two godly friends experienced how dependable the Lord is.

PRAYER: Father, may I always look to Thee as my refuge and shelter in the storms of my life.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 2

1 SAMUEL 21

MATTHEW 5:1-12

*“Blessed are the meek:
for they shall inherit the earth.”*

DAVID WAS PROTECTED FROM DANGERS

When David left the household of King Saul, he had to hide and seek protection from friends as the Lord guided him. David then went to Ahimelech the priest and received assistance, after which he took leave of him. He was restless because of his fear of Saul who continued to seek to kill him. He decided to flee to Achish, king of Gath (a Philistine city). The people of Gath were suspicious of David's mission though the king welcomed him. He feared the accusations made against him by the servants of the king. He then changed his behaviour and got away from danger. Thus, God protected David from his enemies.

To see Ahimelech the priest, David went to Nob. The priest wondered why David was alone. David had a ready answer to explain himself. He said that he was on the king's business and it required haste. The priest would have known that he was very close to the king, so to see him in that condition would be surprising. With David holding a prominent position in the kingdom, Ahimelech was satisfied with his answer.

David was a national figure, and the division with Saul came as Saul battled to keep the throne. The king wanted to keep his position and hand it over to his eldest son when the time came. However, everything pointed to David taking the throne. That was the bone of contention. It was made worse for King Saul that the apparent heir of the throne was a great friend of David. This situation created a predicament in the palace and made David a fugitive. This tension was known to David and a few individuals only. Even Ahimelech the priest was ignorant of what was going on. The answer of confidential assignment was satisfactory. At that point, David needed a place of refuge to save his life. He could not stay too long at Nob because the king had spies everywhere to report of his activities. This was the best David could do at that time.

THOUGHT: *“The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.”* (Ps 37:23)

PRAYER: Father, grant me wisdom, especially in times of danger.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3

1 SAMUEL 21

LUKE 6:1-5

*“...That the Son of man is Lord
also of the sabbath.”*

DAVID ATE HALLOWED BREAD IN THE PRIEST’S HOUSE

David was hungry and desired that the priest gave him something to eat. Ahimelech had nothing to offer him except hallowed bread, which was unlawful for anyone to eat, except the priests. Ahimelech, however, ruled that it was permissible for the men to eat the hallowed bread if they were not defiled with women.

This decision received heavenly sanction. The Lord Jesus Christ made reference to this event many years later. Jesus is the Son of God and He is the Law Giver. Mark 2:25-26 says, *“And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?”* Jesus was here defending His disciples who had plucked the ears of corn in the field on the Sabbath Day. This was a case of the higher law overriding the lower law.

This is a very important principle that the Lord taught the disciples. In the original encounter, the priest made an exception and ruled that it was permissible to eat hallowed bread on the conditions that he gave. David then accepted the bread with thanksgiving. They satisfied their hunger and all was well with them. The primary concern for David at that time was how he was going to save his life from King Saul. The monarch was determined to get rid of him, and Nob was not a safe place for him to be at that time. He had to think quickly as to what his next move should be to ensure his safety. David had the support of the priest, his family in Bethlehem, Jonathan in the palace, and the general public.

THOUGHT: Biblical truth never changes, not even over time.

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, that Thy Word is always profitable.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 4

1 SAMUEL 22

PSALM 34:1-10

*"I sought the LORD,
and he heard me, and
delivered me from all my fears."*

DAVID WAS DELIVERED

King Saul had his spies everywhere. David spotted one at Nob. It was then that the priest gave him the sword of Goliath whom David had slain. David took it and was armed with it. He had to quickly get away from Nob to avoid any danger. He knew that Doeg, *"an Edomite, the chiefest of the herdmen that belonged to Saul"* (1 Sam 21:7), would report to the king and his whereabouts would be exposed. The presence of Doeg was bound to trigger unpleasant events. He had to think quickly of his next move.

David then took refuge in Gath with King Achish. It was not an easy decision for David to flee to Gath, a city of the Philistines. It was not a friendly nation to Israel, but David took the risk and caused the servants of Achish to be suspicious. They knew of the praise (above King Saul) that was accorded to David in Israel. They said that David was the king of the land. Thus, they assumed that he was on a spy mission. David heard what they said and became afraid. He reacted quickly and feigned madness. His reaction to fear was recorded in 1 Samuel 21:13-14: *"And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard. Then said Achish unto his servants, Lo, ye see the man is mad: wherefore then have ye brought him to me?"* This was the measure he took to get out of trouble. He was in his right mind, but he used his human wisdom to escape danger. At that time, he composed Psalm 34. (Abimelech in the title of Psalm 34 referred to Achish.)

David had to flee from Saul who was determined to get rid of him. God protected David.

THOUGHT: Trust the Lord for protection from any danger, and live righteously.

PRAYER: Father, grant me peace of mind as I walk in Thy strait and narrow path.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5

1 SAMUEL 22

PSALM 35:1-12

*“And my soul shall be
joyful in the LORD:
it shall rejoice in his salvation.”*

DAVID GAINED SUPPORT AS SAUL SOUGHT HIM

At this time, David was facing greater danger, thus he sought refuge in a cave as family and friends came to his assistance. Those who had grievances with Saul came to David.

Saul blamed his son Jonathan for David's rebellion. Doeg also reported to Saul about David's mission at Nob with Ahimelech the priest. The king had the priests killed, but one of them escaped and came to David. David lamented the death of the priests, but he remained confident. Here is the sequence of events as the reign of David as king took shape.

David had to flee to the cave of Adullam to avoid Saul's agents. The situation was very dangerous, and his family came to him to support his efforts and to ensure his safety. Many others who were discontented also came to him. These became an army of about four hundred men. It was then a direct confrontation between King Saul and those who supported David. Since David's parents were old, David felt it was not safe for them to remain in Bethlehem. He sought a place of refuge for his parents in the land of Moab. He requested the king of Moab to take care of his parents' safety, thus finding a safe place for them.

The Lord also sent a prophet named Gad to guide David. This was an assurance that David's efforts were in God's will. Gad told David not to abide in that cave, but to go to the land of Judah. David obliged and obeyed. He was greatly encouraged. He had now formed an army that was able to protect him from the people of King Saul. God was guiding his movements all along. He expressed his feelings on such occasions in a number of psalms that he wrote. These revealed that his hope and trust were in his Lord.

THOUGHT: The Lord helps when we call upon Him, but we must do our part to the best of our ability.

PRAYER: Father, grant me wisdom to make the right decisions, especially in acute situations.

SAUL KILLED THE PRIESTS BECAUSE OF DAVID

It was reported to the king where David was staying while he was in Ramah. The king lamented over the exploits of David and he chided his kin, the house of Benjamin, for their seeming sympathy for David. He accused them of conspiring with David and concealing from him the league that his son Jonathan had made with the son of Jesse. He had used all his energy in his attempts to kill David, but he failed. He felt that the obstacles were within his own house. Saul was acting carnally because Prophet Samuel had already told him of God's rejection. Instead of repenting, Saul resorted to carnal vengeance, and he was failing. He should have learned from the response of his son Jonathan, but he did not, and hence he failed.

Doeg reported to King Saul that he had seen David coming to Nob, and that Ahimelech had assisted David by giving him food, inquiring of the Lord for him and giving him the sword of Goliath. This report made the king very angry and merciless in his thirst for revenge. The priest Ahimelech said that he was innocent, but Saul would hear none of that. Saul concluded that Ahimelech was conspiring with David against him. Ahimelech said that he knew David to be a military leader in Saul's kingdom and that David was the king's son-in-law, so he extended that help to David. But Saul found Ahimelech guilty, and sentenced him to death.

Ahimelech and all his family had to die. Saul ordered his footmen to kill the priest, but they feared God and refused to carry out the king's orders. This should have served as a red flag to the king that he was doing wrong, but he had an evil spirit that pushed him to murder. He commanded Doeg to kill the priests, and Doeg did. That massacre saw the death of eighty-five souls in the household of the priest. This murderous act came to the ears of David and he lamented those deaths, but remained confident that the Lord was with him and he would overcome all. God sent the prophet Gad to assist him.

THOUGHT: The prophet's presence was God's presence in David's mission.

PRAYER: Father, give me faith to overcome all my challenges, and may I always look to Thee for success.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7

1 SAMUEL 23

PSALM 20

*“Save, LORD: let the king
hear us when we call.”*

DAVID FOUND A HIDING PLACE

The Lord continued to protect David and hearkened to his prayers. David was loyal to the nation and fought the Philistines. On the other hand, King Saul kept chasing him to get rid of him. David found great support from his own army of six hundred. Jonathan also paid him a visit and they renewed their covenant. David moved from place to place in the wilderness, and the Lord guided his steps. Though he did not have a home, David had the upper hand over King Saul.

David had been moving from place to place, without a home nor military support. He was at a loss as to what to do, but the Lord had not left him. He ensured that David received help. Saul was the king of Israel, but David knew that he would become king after Saul. He was thus loyal to the nation. The Philistines invaded Keilah, a city of Israel. This was reported to David and he did not sit back. He felt that it was his responsibility to protect the land of Israel.

David sought the Lord and He guided him. This was how it happened: *“Then David enquired of the LORD yet again. And the LORD answered him and said, Arise, go down to Keilah; for I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand. So David and his men went to Keilah, and fought with the Philistines, and brought away their cattle, and smote them with a great slaughter. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah”* (1 Sam 23:4-5). David was a man of war and he was ready for combat any time. God never failed him, and he was always assured of victory. In this instance, he not only defeated the Philistine invaders, he also took spoils from them. Abiathar the priest had also resorted to David after Saul had killed many in his family. When he came to David, he brought with him the ephod. Upon learning that David was in Keilah, Saul’s hopes of capturing David were raised because Keilah was an enclosed city. However, David was one step ahead of Saul, and David managed to escape from that city.

THOUGHT: God has His plan to save His own.

PRAYER: Father, Thou art my hope, even when there seems to be no hope.

SAUL FAILED TO CAPTURE DAVID

Though Saul, as king, had a network of intelligence, David was not behind in devising his own security moves. The Lord was there to guide him. It was neither David nor Saul who mattered in this race, but the Creator who determines the destiny of all men. King Saul might have sat for long hours with his counsellors to devise ways and means of capturing David, but Saul had the disadvantage. The king's son himself was a sworn friend of David. On the other hand, David did not count on his friends in the palace. He trusted God, and used wisdom from God to evade capture. He was vigilant.

David prayed and received assurance of safety. David also took advantage of the ephod that Abiathar had brought, and effectively used it to communicate with God. The Lord told him that the men of Keilah would deliver him to Saul. Thus, he immediately went to hide in the wilderness of Ziph. At this critical moment, the Lord sent Jonathan to visit him, and they renewed their covenant of friendship. He came at a time when David was in need of comfort, for Jonathan knew that Saul could capture him at any time.

The most important concern at that time was the safety of David. This is the scene at the meeting of the two friends: *"And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth. And they two made a covenant before the LORD: and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house"* (1 Sam 23:16-18). This is not simply a touching story. It is the work of God in their hearts.

THOUGHT: God gives assurance of protection when I am in need.

PRAYER: Father, may my faith never be shaken whatever the circumstances.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 9

1 SAMUEL 23

PSALM 23

*“Yea, though I walk through the
valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil.”*

SAUL SOUGHT FOR DAVID, BUT ALL WAS IN VAIN

The men of Ziph had told King Saul of David's presence among them. While the king's hopes of capturing David were high, the son of Jesse was no ordinary soldier. He was highly skilled in military manoeuvres. This was natural for him although he had no formal training. God had put in him that wisdom.

While Saul sought him in Ziph, David had already moved to the wilderness of Maon. When he killed Goliath, he told the story of killing a lion and a bear to save the sheep. That experience would have encouraged him that even the giant was no match for him when God is with him. Saul nearly captured David, but again the search party missed him. Later, David wrote in Psalm 23 that though he walked through the valley of the shadow of death, he feared no evil because God was with him. The Lord was the secret to all his successes. At the end of David's life, his life as king became a standard for good kings.

While King Saul was going after David, a messenger came to Saul and told him of the Philistine invasion. The call was urgent and needed the king's attention. Saul immediately returned from pursuing David to fight the Philistines. The place where Saul returned from pursuing David was named Selahammahlekoth, meaning the rock of divisions or escapes. Thus, David was spared and he found a new hiding place in Engedi. Saul departed for a while, but did not give up on going after David. However, the current ceasefire helped David to escape the pursuit of Saul.

God had appointed David to be king and sent Samuel to anoint him. It would have been easy for God to perform a miracle to give the kingship to David. However, He chose to use ordinary means and protected David in critical situations. This is primarily how God works with his people. His sovereignty and human responsibility always go hand in hand. Man must pray, work hard and be faithful in seeking God. Good results come, according to His will.

THOUGHT: God's protection also involves personal diligence.

PRAYER: Father, give me grace to follow Thee and to do my part diligently.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 10

1 SAMUEL 24

PSALM 35:1-8

*“Plead my cause, O LORD,
with them that strive with me:
fight against them that fight against me.”*

DAVID SPARED SAUL'S LIFE

Saul fought the Philistines, and when he was assured of safety on that front, he returned to the wilderness to hunt for David. He had been informed that David was in the wilderness of Engedi.

Since Saul had secured the nation from the invading Philistines, the effort to capture David was foremost on his agenda. He went with an army of three thousand men to search the desert places for David. The large number of men that Saul mobilised to hunt for David showed his determination. The king himself left his palace to do what was foremost according to his priorities.

Saul failed to recall that the kingship he was trying to protect was actually given him of God. All that was in his mind was to eliminate David and hold on to his throne for as long as possible, before he handed it over to one of his sons. He failed to see that all promotion came from God. Saul was slow to learn the lessons that God was teaching him, and in this he disqualified himself as king. In the midst of his large army, he failed to give much thought to his own security. In his determination to get rid of David, Saul underestimated what David could do with God's help.

In his pursuit, Saul happened to go into a cave (where David was hiding) to cool off from the heat and find some relief. The men of David saw that as an opportunity for them and urged David to kill Saul in the cave. But David submitted to the will of God, and spared Saul's life, cutting only the skirt of Saul's robe, because he knew that Saul was God's anointed. He was cautious not to do any harm to the king. He even felt guilty about cutting the skirt of Saul's robe as he knew that he was not supposed to do any harm to, or dishonour, the king. He repented of what he had done and recognised Saul as the Lord's appointed king.

THOUGHT: The sovereign will of God overrules all human decisions, even my enemies'.

PRAYER: Father, as I see the evil around me, give me sincere love even for my enemies as I also see Thy sovereign hand at work.

A MEETING OF SAUL AND DAVID

1 Samuel 24:5-7 says, *“And it came to pass afterward, that David’s heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul’s skirt. And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD’s anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD. So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way.”*

As Saul left the cave, David also went out of the cave and went after Saul. He showed himself to Saul and stooped before him. He acknowledged Saul as his king and assured the king that he would not hurt him. David graciously disregarded the circumstances that prevailed then and sought to make peace with his king. He spoke of how he had spared the king’s life in the cave, and that he was not the king’s enemy.

David showed what it meant to obey God. He trusted God and refused to kill even the one who was hunting his life. David showed in a very real way what it means to entrust one’s life to God.

David’s action was contrary to the expectation of the king and his servants. Even David’s men were surprised that their master David did not use the opportunity in the cave to kill King Saul. It was David’s God-given wisdom that guided him to adopt a peaceful means in order to end his conflict with Saul. He fully recognised Saul as the king and that it was God who had put him into that office. He called him the Lord’s anointed.

The two entered into a conversation as each party was restrained. The hostility ceased after the meeting between David and the king. Saul was subdued by the turn of events. In this, David demonstrated his wisdom that came from God. He also exercised humility on his part.

THOUGHT: God gives thoughts of peace even when there is hatred.

PRAYER: Father, help me to choose Thy way of peace in times of conflict.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12

1 SAMUEL 24

PSALM 39

*“Hear my prayer, O LORD,
and give ear unto my cry...”*

DAVID JUSTIFIED HIMSELF BEFORE KING SAUL

David had a piece of Saul’s skirt in his hand. In humility, he said that he had sinned against the king in that matter. His action and words disarmed the king. It made the king guilty that he was with a large army hunting for David out of personal hatred. David told Saul that he should not be hunting for him. He appealed to the Lord’s judgment on this matter. David cited the old proverb that wickedness proceeds from the wicked, but he pledged that he would not harm the king. David spoke in humility and the king was subdued. A ceasefire between them came as a result.

The king wept for what David had said and done. He praised the act of David and admitted that David was more righteous than him. Saul appreciated what David did and conceded that David would become king.

David handled matters righteously. He established God’s will in matters that befell him. Saul acknowledged that David was destined for a high office. Thus, Saul asked David to swear to treat his family well. David readily complied and a new chapter began in the struggle for Israel’s throne.

The lesson of forgiveness is clear. David was guided by the Spirit of God. He knew that the peaceful approach to resolving conflict was God’s way. He treated his king graciously. Love for one’s enemy is the law of God. Let us follow the example of David, and pray for God’s blessing of peace.

THOUGHT: Peace and love are part of the fruit of the Spirit.

PRAYER: Father, help me to bear the fruit of the Spirit as I serve Thee.

DAVID, NABAL AND ABIGAIL

1 Samuel 25 is a diversion from David's contention with Saul. For a long time, David's men had been giving assistance to Nabal, a rich man of Maon *“whose possessions were in Carmel”* (1 Sam 25:2), and there he sheared his sheep. Nabal's wife was Abigail. David sent his men to Nabal to ask for food provisions. Nabal refused and spoke rudely and proudly to the men of David. Upon receiving the report, David was determined to destroy Nabal (1 Sam 25:13). This matter was made known to Abigail and the Lord used her to save the situation by her wise action and counsel. David accepted her imploration and spared Nabal. Shortly, the Lord Himself smote Nabal and he died.

David and his men had protected Nabal's property. When David was in need, it was natural for him to ask for assistance from the man he had assumed to be a friend. David thus sent his men to go and speak to Nabal in David's name, to ask Nabal to give him and his men some food. At this time, David was disadvantaged, and was concerned for his men's safety. He could not get his own resources to provide for his men's needs because he was a fugitive. He had loyal friends who were sympathetic to his condition and they stood with him. Since he had assisted Nabal in Carmel, David did not doubt that Nabal would help, and so he sent his men to Nabal to make that request.

Nabal was uncooperative and spoke rudely to David's messengers. *“And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?”* (1 Sam 25:10-11). Nabal pretended that he did not know David, but that was his way of saying that he did not want to give anything to David. The servants of David turned and went away, and they reported to David all the words of Nabal.

THOUGHT: The unconverted soul is insensitive to the truth.

PRAYER: Father, may I always treat my friends kindly.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14

1 SAMUEL 25

ACTS 16:13-15

*“...whose heart the Lord opened,
that she attended unto the things
which were spoken of Paul.”*

ABIGAIL ACTED WISELY TO RESTRAIN DAVID

David was in a state of war and anyone who showed any negative attitude was counted as an enemy. David expressed thus: *“So and more also do God unto the enemies of David, if I leave of all that pertain to him by the morning light any that pisseth against the wall”* (1 Sam 25:22).

When the report of Nabal’s reaction came to David, David quickly decided to go after Nabal. He was determined to punish Nabal for not only refusing to grant his request, but also for the bitter words that he had spoken.

When David’s men had left Nabal’s place, a servant of Nabal informed Abigail of the situation. She was alarmed by what had taken place and quickly planned to take wise action to save the situation. She knew what David would do and she acted to restrain him.

Since David had asked Nabal for food, Abigail quickly assembled a variety of food items and had her servants load them on several donkeys. She asked her servants to take them to David as she followed behind. She expected her gift to tone down David’s anger. Her action probably also registered her support for David, and her gratitude to David and his men for protecting them and their possessions at Carmel.

When Abigail’s men brought her gifts to David, they informed him that it was the hand of Abigail that had sent the gifts. Her gifts were far more fruitful than simple lip-service. Abigail understood this and by the time she came to meet David, her action had done its work.

THOUGHT: Kindness is a virtue and is the fruit of the Spirit.

PRAYER: Father, lead me to the right persons in times of need.

ABIGAIL'S SPEECH WAS FRUITFUL

When Abigail met David, she bowed in humility. She apologised on her husband's behalf. She told him that she did not see the young men when they came. She distanced herself from Nabal's rude treatment of David's men. At the same time, she asked for forgiveness for what had happened. She also asked David to remember her when he prospered.

There is no background information about Abigail except that she was the wife of Nabal. Nevertheless, she was a godly woman. She quickly understood how to arrest an ugly situation caused by her husband. She was a mediator of peace and also showed her generosity. She did not withhold the food that she had, but donated it to David and his men. Her speech and character showed that she was spiritually mature. Her husband was a wealthy man, but he was apathetic. He was a drunkard. He also did not care for other people. He was carefree and boastful. Abigail chose to build her reputation with good character traits, while her husband used earthly possessions to oppress others.

David accepted Abigail's gifts and imploration. He thanked the Lord for sending Abigail. He revealed the evil that he had determined against Nabal. Peace reigned and all was well.

Although Saul continued in his struggle to keep the throne, David continued to worship and fear God. God guided David's steps. Nabal, on the other hand, continued in his drunkenness. When he recovered from the intoxicating stupor, he was informed of what had transpired and he was greatly afraid. The Lord then smote him, and he died.

When all was settled, David sent messengers with a marriage proposal to Abigail. She readily consented to the proposal and became David's wife. God is gracious and would reward the humble. May we learn to be grateful and return generosity with equal measure.

THOUGHT: Wise and godly actions yield good fruits.

PRAYER: Father, may Thy Spirit guide all my decisions.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 16

1 SAMUEL 26

PROVERBS 21:21-23

*“A wise man scaleth
the city of the mighty...”*

THE ENCOUNTER IN THE WILDERNESS OF ZIPH

During the brief ceasefire, the men of Ziph spotted David in their midst. They reported to King Saul. The king quickly assembled an army of three thousand to pursue after David. The king had earlier sent word around that if anyone saw David, they should inform him. He had quickly forgotten that David had spared his life earlier in the cave. He revived his objective to capture and get rid of David. Though he had a network of informants, David proved smarter than him. When he and his men came, they searched everywhere for David during the day.

When night came, Saul's men pitched on the hill of Hachilah and slept in an open field. David's spies took note of where the king laid. Abishai asked David for permission to kill Saul, but David overruled him. David took the king's spear and a cruse of water without any violence. This was no mean achievement in a military operation. David proved himself again as one led by the Spirit of God. He had done his calculations well. He did not shed blood. Prior to this confrontational relationship, David was among the household staff of the king. He was a singer and an army commander. He knew Saul and how to deal with him when he was under pressure. The whole army and the king slept heavily. David stood by his principle that Saul was the Lord's anointed, and he ought not to kill him.

David was courageous because he was sure of the final outcome. The Lord had revealed to him that he would be king. He had the responsibility to ensure that he was not exposed to the enemy and be killed. He took preventive measures to see to it that he fulfilled his goals. David had such wisdom, and he soldiered on even when the signs seemed contrary. He decided to confront Saul face to face. As a man of war, he carried his weapons. He could use them in self-defence. However, David knew that the Lord would grant him the needed support. He acknowledged God's hand in all his moves. His life was in danger, but his approach was a non-violent one. Only God could give him such wisdom.

THOUGHT: God is always a shield to those who follow Him faithfully.

PRAYER: Father, may Thy protective care be with me continuously.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17
1 SAMUEL 26
MARK 12:28-34

*“..Thou shalt love thy neighbour
as thyself. There is none other
commandment greater than these.”*

DAVID SAVED SAUL'S LIFE A SECOND TIME

David again cornered King Saul, sparing his life once more. Nightfall is strategically useful in warfare. King Saul and his army fell asleep when night came, and David was hiding not far from where the king's team was camped. His informants had verified where everyone was sleeping, and informed David accordingly.

David then made his way to where the king slept; he was accompanied by one assistant only. When they came, the whole company was asleep. The king's spear was stuck in the ground by his side, and his cruse of water was there too. Abishai saw this as a good opportunity to kill Saul. He saw this as a way to end the strife, but David had a different understanding. He restrained Abishai from doing any harm to the king. David feared the Lord and he knew that the Lord had sent a heavy sleep upon Saul's company. As such, he told Abishai to take the spear and the cruse of water, whilst the Lord sent a heavy sleep upon Saul's company. They had to prove that they had been in the camp, yet they did not kill. David believed that when the time came, the Lord would smite Saul. To submit to the will of the Lord is the best option.

Having the king's spear and the cruse of water was evidence of their entry into Saul's camp. 1 Samuel 26:12 says that it was the Lord who sent a heavy sleep upon them. David went a distance away where his voice could still be heard, and shouted to Abner and the people in the camp. According to the wisdom given by God, David chose the approach of kindness and obedience to the Lord.

Though Saul regarded him as an enemy, David used the opportunity to show that he feared the Lord and loved his king. He was persuaded that he had to keep the law of the Lord regardless of his circumstances. The sum of God's law is to love the Lord and our neighbour. David knew the Law, and he demonstrated that obedience to the law of God is superior to carnality.

THOUGHT: The test of love is seen in how I treat my enemies.

PRAYER: Father, help me to choose to love my enemies, and not to take revenge.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18

1 SAMUEL 26

ISAIAH 54:10-15

*“For the mountains shall depart,
and the hills be removed; but my
kindness shall not depart from thee...”*

DAVID OVERRULED ABISHAI

David chided Abner for not protecting the king. Abner was the captain of the hosts, and it was his duty to protect the king. If an enemy would come today and disarm the king in the presence of the chief bodyguard, the bodyguard would not only lose his job but would go to jail. This was what Abner did and he deserved punishment. David called from a distance and addressed that failure. He said, *“And David said to Abner, Art not thou a valiant man? and who is like to thee in Israel? wherefore then hast thou not kept thy lord the king? for there came one of the people in to destroy the king thy lord. This thing is not good that thou hast done. As the LORD liveth, ye are worthy to die, because ye have not kept your master, the LORD’s anointed. And now see where the king’s spear is, and the cruse of water that was at his bolster”* (1 Sam 26:15-16).

Saul spoke to David, then they parted ways. David addressed Saul with kind words. He proved his innocence and pleaded for an end to their enmity. The king had to admit his guilt, and praised David for sparing his life when it was in his power to kill. David pleaded for the Lord’s judgment between them, and stood by his principle that Saul was anointed of the Lord as king and he would not touch him. Saul blessed David, and departed peacefully.

David was indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He stood on godly principles because God gave him the grace to understand His law and to apply his knowledge accordingly.

THOUGHT: The Lord’s presence in a man’s life is seen in all his actions.

PRAYER: Father, give me a wise and spiritual heart to love others.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19
1 SAMUEL 27
PSALM 16:1-6

*“The lines are fallen unto me
in pleasant places;
yea, I have a goodly heritage.”*

DAVID TOOK REFUGE AMONG THE PHILISTINES

After David spared Saul’s life, he did not feel safe because he was not persuaded of the king’s sincerity. He thus decided to escape to the land of the Philistines. Though the nation was not friendly with Israel, David found a friendly approach, and the king of the Philistines welcomed him. It was a bold decision but the Lord guided and worked in the hearts of all the key persons involved. Thus, David moved to the land of the Philistines. He formally asked the king for a separate city outside the king’s capital to establish himself there.

David’s decision was important. He knew that King Saul had not given up in his pursuit to get rid of him. Saul was such a hard-hearted person that even the kindness of David in sparing his life twice could not move him to take a positive approach. David was well-informed about the king’s position. He had exhausted all possible places where he could hide within the land of Israel. He then decided to take refuge in the enemies’ land even though it was risky. He came to this decision because Saul could not go after him without fighting the Philistines. The Philistines were enemies of Israel, it was not a simple task to convince the king of Gath to assist David.

David knew that God would not fail in fulfilling His promise. At the same time, he knew that he was personally responsible to put his plans in place that would lead to success. This included personal safety and building up a strong support from the people of Israel. Thus, David made this move.

THOUGHT: God works even in the heart of the enemy to save His own.
PRAYER: Father, while I fulfil my human responsibility, may my safety depend not on my own might and power, but on Thee.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20

1 SAMUEL 27

PSALM 62:1-4

*“Truly my soul waiteth upon God:
from him cometh my salvation.”*

DAVID FOUND REFUGE IN GATH

Saul could not keep up with the moves of David. He had focused on killing him, but David was ahead of the king. Saul knew in his heart that David would be the next king of Israel, but he could not accept it.

Matthew Henry said, “Unbelief is a sin that easily besets even good men, when without are fightings and within are fears; and it is a hard matter to get over them. Lord, increase our faith! We may blush to think that the word of a Philistine should go further than the word of an Israelite, and that the city of Gath should be a place of refuge for a good man, when the cities of Israel refuse him a safe abode. David gained a comfortable settlement, not only at a distance from Gath, but bordering upon Israel, where he might keep up a correspondence with his own countrymen.”

When David moved to the land of the Philistines, he had an army of six hundred men. The king of Gath granted him the refuge. The people who were with David had to relocate to stay together. Life as a refugee was not easy, and all these responsibilities rested on the shoulders of David. He had learned how to survive and adapt himself to any given situation. He escaped to Gath, the city of Achish the king. Achish welcomed David and David was ready for a long-term settlement. He knew that the refuge in Gath was better.

King Saul had commanded his men to apprehend David or to kill him. Thus, David felt safer in a foreign land than in his own nation. This was a land that was perceived as a perpetual enemy of Israel. David rose to fame by killing a Philistine champion. Then he was a refugee in that nation. In God’s wisdom, he was able to get around potential problems which later turned out victorious. His presence in the land of Philistines was known to King Saul who did not continue his pursuit. The negative relationship between the two nations worked then to David’s advantage. This was God’s providence. David’s struggle, however, was not yet over.

THOUGHT: Look always to God.

PRAYER: Father, help me to always make the right decision.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21
1 SAMUEL 27
PSALM 101

*“I will behave myself wisely
in a perfect way.
O when wilt thou come unto me?...”*

DAVID ESTABLISHED HIMSELF IN ZIKLAG

As Gath was a royal city of the Philistines, David told Achish that it was not suitable for him. He thus asked Achish to give him another place. The king then gave him the city of Ziklag, which became a city of the kings of Judah. David annexed it to be part of Israel. Though he liked this place that offered him rest, he still had plans to return to his home city of Bethlehem in Judah. David dwelled in the land of the Philistines for a year and four months.

David was a man of war all his life. When he invaded those nations near Ziklag, he smote every living person and took the spoils (1 Sam 27:9). This included mainly livestock and anything valuable. In killing every living person, he obliterated all witnesses. No one could accuse him of what he did, and thus he could conceal his raid (1 Sam 27:11).

David returned with the spoils. When Achish inquired of David, David replied, “...*Against the south of Judah, and against the south of the Jerahmeelites, and against the south of the Kenites*” (1 Sam 27:10).

1 Samuel 27:12 tells us: “*And Achish believed David, saying, He hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him; therefore he shall be my servant for ever.*” Achish was glad for what David did, because it would cause Israel to hate David, and then David would have to remain in the land of the Philistines and be his servant forever.

THOUGHT: God prevails over man’s schemes.

PRAYER: Father, may I always trust in Thy Sovereignty.

SAUL'S APOSTASY IN THE FACE OF DEFEAT

The Philistines prepared for war against Israel. Their king asked David to join them against King Saul. Prophet Samuel had died. Saul inquired of the Lord, but the Lord had departed from him and did not answer him. His next step was a step in the wrong direction: he resorted to witchcraft.

In this first step to apostasy, Saul asked his servants to seek for him *“...a woman that hath a familiar spirit...”* (1 Sam 28:7). This was a reference to a witch. As king, Saul had earlier given an order for the destruction of all that had familiar spirits. He was then basing his hopes on what he knew to be sinful. However, he yielded to the temptation and followed the ways of the world. He did not consider how the Lord had taken him from his father's house and made him a king. God had successfully guided him under the ministry of Samuel, and he should be the last person to cast doubt on God. He compromised and that step backward led to his complete departure from God.

When the king asked for a woman with a familiar spirit, his servants were quick to identify the witch of Endor. The weakness of the servants was also the weakness of the king. They did not know God and in the days following, they influenced the king. They were his advisers and the king relied on them in making decisions. When the name of that woman was suggested, Saul did not hesitate to seek help from her.

As the king of Israel yielded to his carnality, he went deeper into sin. The way of truth was there for him to follow, but he chose the route of apostasy. In the current narrative, he had begun to fall. The ascension of Saul to the throne of Israel ended a long era of judges. The description of the events that characterised that era was that there was no king, and everyone did that which was right in his own eyes. Saul was then no better.

THOUGHT: The consequences of apostasy are the wages of sin.

PRAYER: Father, open my eyes that I may discern good and evil.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 23

1 SAMUEL 28

PSALM 16:7-11

*"I have set the LORD
always before me..."*

SAUL IN THE HOUSE OF THE WITCH

Saul disguised himself and put on a set of different clothing. The behaviour of the king at this point betrayed his guilt. He went with only two servants in order to hide from the others what he was about to do. It was a shameful step that he was taking, and he did not want anybody to know except those close servants. He went in the dark of the night so that nobody could recognise him. Thus, he concealed his identity.

When he arrived, he asked the woman to divine by a familiar spirit (i.e. an evil spirit). All this time, Saul did not recognise that he had moved far away from God. He spoke the language of a witch and did not feel any guilt because the Spirit of God had departed from him. He asked the woman to bring up whom he was going to name. This communication revealed that the king of Israel was familiar with the activities of witches.

In seeking help through witchcraft, Saul exhibited his belief in another power besides the Lord God. This goes against the first commandment which says, *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me"* (Exod 20:3).

Saul had set his hopes on the support of this witch because he was convinced by his sinful persuasion. He had put himself on the path of no return. His servants were equally guilty because they did not raise their objection to advise the king against the danger of what he was doing.

Saul made known to the woman his purpose. Not recognising Saul, the woman was fearful and concerned for her safety as the king had already ordered the cutting off of all witches in the land (1 Sam 28:9).

The king was so spiritually blinded that he pinned his hopes on a witch.

THOUGHT: Satan is the king of deception, and the king of Israel was hooked.

PRAYER: Father, protect us from the wiles of the devil.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24

1 SAMUEL 28:9-25

DEUTERONOMY 18:9-13

*“Thou shalt be perfect
with the LORD thy God.”*

GOD’S PROPHECY AGAINST SAUL AND HIS SONS

Saul’s fight to retain the throne of Israel was failing. His reign was coming to an end. His act of seeking help from a witch was an act of desperation that displeased God.

The woman was concerned that the men were laying up a snare for her, and were plotting to cause her death (1 Sam 28:9). At this point, the king swore to her “*...by the LORD...*” (1 Sam 28:10) that she would not be punished. She then consented to divine for him. The use of the LORD’s name would have implied that both the woman and Saul knew that divination was nothing, but in their sinful way they chose to look at it with some hope. The belief in witchcraft had existed for generations and up till then many had been deceived to think that there was some supernatural power in it. It is a tool of Satan to keep people away from trusting the One, True God.

In reply to the woman’s question, Saul asked for the dead Samuel to be brought up. Then “*...when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice...*” (1 Sam 28:12). This showed that she did not expect to see Samuel. Then she suddenly saw through Saul’s disguise and realized that she was talking to King Saul. When she described the person that she saw, Saul “*...perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself*” (1 Sam 28:14). And Samuel talked with Saul.

Although God forbids communion with the dead (Deut 18:10-11), God brought Samuel back from the dead as an indictment of Saul. Samuel’s message to Saul was that God would deliver him and his sons into the hand of the Philistines, and they would die under the Philistines. Saul fainted upon hearing Samuel’s prophecy.

As children of God, we must never resort to wizardry or sorcery, or have anything to do with it. Our help comes from the Lord only.

THOUGHT: When men reject God, God will also reject them.

PRAYER: Father, may I come to Thee on Thy terms, and never turn away from Thee.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25

1 SAMUEL 29

PSALM 109:26 -31

*“Help me, O LORD my God:
O save me according to thy mercy.”*

DAVID’S TRUST IN GOD AFFIRMED

David had taken refuge in the land of the Philistines to escape capture and death in the hands of King Saul. He had taken this step as a last resort because he was in real danger. He was conversant in military and diplomatic matters. He had six hundred men with him as his army. These men also had their families with them.

While he was in that land, the Philistines went to war against Israel. There was constant war between Israel and the Philistines. Raiding enemy nations and taking spoils from them were part and parcel of war. That was the main bone of contention. When a nation gained control over a weaker nation, they would confiscate their possessions and put them under tribute. The Philistines were the aggressors in the current war. They prepared an army for war with Israel. 1 Samuel 29 depicts King Achish mobilising his army, gathering them in companies of hundreds and thousands. David and his six hundred men followed the servants of Achish. The Philistine king had no problem with David joining him in the war. He simply saw him as a loyal servant. Thus, Achish accepted the presence of David in the war.

David joined them in order to assure Achish that he was loyal to him. This was a dilemma for David because in his heart he recognised Saul as the legitimate king of Israel. At the same time, he had pledged loyalty to Achish.

The Philistine princes, however, saw the inclusion of David differently. They urged their king to send David away from the battlefield. Thus, David was forced to go back. As a result, he did not have to fight King Saul, who was God’s anointed.

THOUGHT: God never ceases to be our sufficiency.

PRAYER: Father, may my trust in Thee always stand.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 26

1 SAMUEL 29

PSALM 121

*“My help cometh from the LORD,
which made heaven and earth.”*

DAVID SPARED FROM FIGHTING SAUL

Today, we look further into the Philistine princes' objection of David joining their army in their battle against Israel.

We have seen that David won the heart of Achish. The Philistine princes did not know the details of David's agreement with their king. To them, David was the servant of Saul, their enemy, and they took it that David would not be loyal to them. However, King Achish had come to trust David, and welcomed him. Achish was full of praise for David. He said that he had found no fault in him since the day he came to his land. He held David in high regard.

The Philistine princes knew David from the time he was in Israel. They objected to his presence in their battle. They compelled Achish to make David return, and not go to battle with them. This became a turning point as it was an answer to David's predicament. He might not have expected this turn of events, but God was in control. The Lord inclined the hearts of the princes to reject David.

The reasoning of the princes was natural. They supposed that David might become their adversary in battle. This was their communication with their king: *“And the princes of the Philistines were wroth with him; and the princes of the Philistines said unto him, Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us: for wherewith should he reconcile himself unto his master? should it not be with the heads of these men?”* (1 Sam 29:4). Those princes saw this move as putting their lives in danger. This was responsible advice to their king in that situation.

Though they differed in their opinion, David did what King Achish wanted. Looking at the broader picture of the matter, the position of the princes served David well. God worked in them to take that position to save David from fighting King Saul. God opened a door to get David out of his dilemma. God was his shepherd.

THOUGHT: I shall never want because God is my Shepherd.

PRAYER: Father, lead me whatever my circumstances.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 27
1 SAMUEL 29
PSALM 143:1-5

“...O LORD,
give ear to my supplications:
in thy faithfulness answer me...”

DAVID WON AS ACHISH GAVE IN TO THE PRINCES

As a man after God's own heart, David sought answers from God. Several records about him showed the kind of person he was and his relationship with God. The princes of the Philistines knew David and his involvement in wars when he was with King Saul. They recalled that the women had sung and danced in praise of David killing ten thousands while Saul had killed only thousands after David had killed their champion Goliath. To the Philistine princes, David's mission in their land was nothing but espionage. They thus advised their king accordingly.

God's Word is always true, especially Romans 8:28: *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”* Achish gave in to the demands of his princes. The king made his decision known to David (1 Sam 29:6-7). David understood their concern, but he insisted that he was ready to go to battle with them. He also asked Achish if he had found any fault in him. The king assured him that he had not found anything unworthy about him since he came. However, he asserted that the princes of the land were against it.

David obliged and departed in the morning as the king had told him.

The Lord was with David and directed him in paths of righteousness so that he might do His will. The situation David was in was not easy, but God came to his rescue so that he did not have to fight Saul.

May we always trust our Lord to guide all our ways, no matter how difficult or impossible.

THOUGHT: God is in control of all things.

PRAYER: Father, forgive me for my failure to see Thy sovereign hand.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 28

1 SAMUEL 30

PSALM 43

*“Why art thou cast down,
O my soul? and why art thou
disquieted within me? hope in God...”*

DAVID DISPLAYED WISE LEADERSHIP

David had many enemies. When he was relieved from joining the Philistines to fight against King Saul, he was set for another demanding task. In this, he also showed wise leadership in the midst of adversity. The Amalekites invaded Ziklag where he lived. They took everything including the wives and children of David and his men while David was away. David encouraged himself in the Lord. He fought back and won. He also reconciled the warring parties in his camp and assisted the needy in Judah. His approach proved again that he was a worthy leader, destined to be king of Israel. He was prepared by God for the higher office.

David was set for conflict after conflict; he was without rest from the time that he was anointed to be king. Saul hunted him everywhere with the great desire to destroy him. David called upon the Lord to rescue him. In 1 Samuel 29, the Philistine princes rejected him from joining them in war against Saul. That decision worked out for his good. However, while he was away from his camp in Ziklag, the Amalekites smote their city (which Achish had given him). When David and his men returned, they found the city burnt, and their families and possessions taken away. It was a disaster. Their immediate reaction was to weep greatly. David did not know what to do. His men blamed him for what had happened, and they spoke of stoning him. David, however, was a man who encouraged himself in the LORD.

The magnitude of their loss was great. David was then facing attack on three fronts and was on the losing end. He was also a man of like passions as all of us. Such are the circumstances that one ought to expect in war situation; you live or die. David was then a victim of what he was capable of doing to others. He did not make a move immediately. However, he saw hope where there was no hope when he encouraged himself in the LORD His God. He was assured of victory by faith, by the LORD Himself when he sought Him in prayer.

THOUGHT: A man of God sees all things are possible with God.

PRAYER: Father, show me Thy way of hope in my current circumstances.

DAVID ENCOURAGED HIMSELF IN THE LORD

David looked to God for help. He knew that he was not alone in that time of danger. He never lost his confidence in God, and help came quickly. The ephod was used to communicate with God and the answer was assuring. David then organised his army for the rescue mission. He was resourceful and courageous. He acted to contain a possible discontent in his army. He had all the qualities of a leader. God's help was evident in the events.

The Lord came to his rescue. God's way of overcoming the Amalekites and recovering their families and possessions was to unfold. The men of David found a weak and hungry Egyptian who provided information that led them to the camp of the Amalekites. It was the providence of God that this man was left behind. The information was instrumental for the success of that mission. The man asked David to swear that he would not deliver him to his master or kill him. David agreed, and he swore to him by God. The effort to rescue those captives was not easy. There was a possibility of the loss of life on both sides, but David had received an assurance from the Lord that all would be recovered. However, he was also mindful of human responsibility and had to plan everything carefully before confronting the Amalekites.

David smote the enemy and recovered everything: He sprang a surprise on them. He took the first step in the attack. Since the captives were women and children, the enemy could use them as human shields. But God helped David, and he recovered everything (people and animals), and the enemy was smitten. God fulfilled His promise to David.

David led the victorious return to Ziklag. Some of David's men wanted to withhold the spoils from those who did not go with them to battle, but David overruled them. He told them that each would receive an equal amount, whether they had gone to war or not. David made this a perpetual law in Israel. He also sent portions of spoils to Judah, his kinsmen and friends.

THOUGHT: David's ability came from the Lord who does all things well.

PRAYER: Father, may I always submit to Thy will, and have Thy peace.

KING SAUL DIED IN WAR

It was a matter of time before King Saul saw his end. He had chased David away from Israel. His trusted servant was now taking refuge in the enemy nation of the Philistines. God protected David so that he was not part of the war in which Saul was killed. When David had returned to Ziklag, the Philistines went to war with Israel.

The Lord caused the king of Israel to fall to his enemies because it was determined that he had to go. At the commencement of the battle, the Philistines proved stronger. They killed the three sons of Saul: Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua. The king was hit by arrows and his army was on the losing end. He was thus subjected to the enemy. It was because he had been rejected by the Lord.

Saul and his sons were killed and Israel was defeated. The Philistines humiliated Israel and took their spoils and the men of Jabeshgilead burned the bodies of Saul and his sons and buried their bones. They also took time to mourn and fasted in their honour. The Lord's hand was in all the events and Israel was set for greatness. It was the end of an era, and the beginning of another.

The narrative showed that Saul and the men of Israel were not ready and were weak from the onset. Saul knew that he was going to die, and he opted to take his own life rather than die in the hands of the Philistines. He ordered his armourbearer to slay him for he was badly wounded and did not want to die in the hands of the uncircumcised. He wanted to save his face even though he was on the verge of death. The armourbearer could not lift his hand against his master and so he refused to follow the king's order because it was against his call of duty. There was no time for them to waste as they were in the middle of the battle. Saul decided to end his life by falling upon his own sword, and he died. It was a sad end for the king of Israel even as he was facing death, he would have been saved if he had put his trust in the Lord, but he did not. This is a spiritual lesson for us to learn.

THOUGHT: Salvation is possible even at the last breath.

PRAYER: Father, “rescue the perishing, care for the dying.”

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31
1 SAMUEL 31
1 CORINTHIANS 15:55-58

*“But thanks be to God,
which giveth us the victory
through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

THE PHILISTINES GAINED VICTORY OVER ISRAEL

It was appointed of God that Saul would have such an end, but his death was not a cause for rejoicing. It was a tragedy. God's people are to trust Him, especially so in critical moments.

Saul's armourbearer also died by suicide. He likewise fell on his sword when he saw that his master was dead. In addition, all the men of war of King Saul were slain. Those who escaped the sword fled from the battlefield. The Philistines were able to defeat Israel because God handed over the king of Israel to them as a means of chastisement.

The war between Israel and the Philistines was not new, and Saul and his men would have known better. However, the Lord carried out His will. As a result, that tragedy befell them. When it was evident that Israel had lost the war, the rest of the people who escaped the sword fled from the battlefield to save their lives.

Everybody else left the city and ran away. At this point, they were concerned about saving their lives more than keeping their homes and possessions. This is the typical scenerio in the aftermath of any war as the victims are at the mercy of their enemies. Israel had enjoyed victories when they entered Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, but when they departed from the ways of the Lord, they were punished. The period of Judges tells of their defeat by other nations. They asked the Lord for a king and the Lord gave them Saul. And this was the result. The Lord used enemy nations to chastise them whenever they departed from Him. The death of Saul was a case in point. The current defeat was a consequence of the conduct of Saul, but the Lord had not forsaken the nation. He would soon raise it again.

THOUGHT: Obedience to God is not dictated by our mood.

PRAYER: Father, help me to remain faithful to Thee at all times.

Notes

To: *The RPG Ministry*

Calvary Pandan B-P Church

201 Pandan Gardens, Singapore 609 337

Tel: (65)-6560 1111 Fax: (65)-6561 1861 Email: rpg@calvarypandan.sg

Read Pray Grow (RPG) is a Daily Devotional Guide published and distributed quarterly free-of-charge by The RPG Ministry. If you have been blessed by this Devotional Guide, you may wish to request it for yourself or for your loved ones and friends by filling in the form below.

1. Please send me: (*Maximum 2 years*)

___ years of ___ copies per issue of RPG

___ years of ___ copies per issue of Teenz RPG

___ years of ___ copies per issue of Junior RPG

___ years of ___ copies per issue of Chinese RPG

Starting from month: JAN / APR / JUL / OCT _____ (year)

2. Name: (Dr/Rev/Mr/Mrs/Miss/Mdm/Ms) _____

Address: _____

Country: _____ Postal Code: _____

Tel no.: _____ (H/O) _____ (Mobile)

Email (*Important for receipt & renewal*):

Postage & handling cost for 4 issues per year

<i>No. of copies per issue</i>	<i>Singapore</i>	<i>Malaysia/Brunei</i>	<i>Asia</i>	<i>Other Countries</i>	
	<i>Local Mail</i>	<i>Airmail</i>	<i>Airmail</i>	<i>Surface Mail</i>	<i>Airmail</i>
<i>1 copy</i>	<i>S\$6.00</i>	<i>S\$8.00</i>	<i>S\$15.00</i>	<i>S\$8.00</i>	<i>S\$20.00</i>
<i>2 copies</i>	<i>S\$7.00</i>	<i>S\$12.00</i>	<i>S\$23.00</i>	<i>S\$12.00</i>	<i>S\$31.00</i>
<i>5 copies</i>	<i>S\$10.00</i>	<i>S\$23.00</i>	<i>S\$50.00</i>	<i>S\$24.00</i>	<i>S\$67.00</i>

Love Gift: The RPG Ministry welcomes love gifts from readers to help meet the cost of publishing and distribution. Hence, your generous support is much needed and greatly appreciated. "Freely ye have received, freely give." (Matthew 10:8)

Enclosed is my love gift of

Please make all love gifts payable to: CALVARY PANDAN B-P CHURCH

*International donors please send love gifts by Bank Draft in Singapore Dollars.
Please do not send cash by post.*

I give clear and unambiguous consent for Tabernacle Books to receive, store and use my personal information given above. (In compliance with Personal Data Protection Act 2012, Singapore)

Name / Signature



To: *The RPG Ministry*
 Calvary Pandan B-P Church
 201 Pandan Gardens, Singapore 609 337
 电话: (65)-6560 1111 传真: (65)-6561 1861 电邮: rpg@calvarypandan.sg

《读经、祷告、长进》(读祷长)乃读祷长事工定期出版并免费赠阅的每日灵修辅助本。你若因这灵修辅助读本蒙福,且愿意为自己或朋友订阅此刊物,请填写以下表格:

1. 请寄:(最多两年数量)

____ 份 ____ 年数量之英文版读祷长
 ____ 份 ____ 年数量之英文少年版读祷长
 ____ 份 ____ 年数量之英文小学生版读祷长
 ____ 份 ____ 年数量之中文版读祷长

从 _____ 年 一月/四月/七月/十月 起分发

2. 姓名:(Dr/Rev/Mr/Mrs/Miss/Mdm/Ms) _____

地址: _____

国家: _____ 邮区: _____

电话: _____ (H/O) _____ (手提电话)

电邮(为发收据与更新使用): _____

一年四期的邮费及运送费

每期数量	新加坡	马来西亚/文莱	亚洲	其他国家	
	本地邮费	空运	空运	平邮	空运
1 copy	S\$6.00	S\$8.00	S\$15.00	S\$8.00	S\$20.00
2 copies	S\$7.00	S\$12.00	S\$23.00	S\$12.00	S\$31.00
5 copies	S\$10.00	S\$23.00	S\$50.00	S\$24.00	S\$67.00

爱心奉献: 读祷长事工欢迎读者的爱心奉献以资助印刷与运输费。因此,我们需要您的慷慨奉献与帮助。谨此献上感谢。“你们白白地得来,也要白白地舍去。”(马太福音10:8)

谨此附上爱心奉献

支票请注明收款人: CALVARY PANDAN B-P CHURCH

海外捐款者,请使用(以新币兑现之)银行汇票。请勿汇现金。

我谨明确允准帐幕书局收收据集,储存并使用我所提供的上述个人资料。(遵照新加坡个人资料保护法令2012的要求)

 姓名 / 签名

